

**Levy visit**  
PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak will meet with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy in Alexandria on Sunday. The one-day trip is the foreign minister's first official visit to Egypt since taking office last June, and comes after a series of lower level contacts this week in Paris between Mubarak's political adviser, Osama El-Baz, Netanyahu's top foreign policy adviser, Dore Gold, and Dennis Ross, the US special representative to the Middle East peace talks.

**Syrian track**  
SYRIAN President Hafez Al-Assad met with US Senator Arlen Specter, head of the Senate's Intelligence Oversight Committee, in Damascus yesterday, amid moves to reactivate Syrian-Israeli peace talks. Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Sharaa and the US ambassador to Syria also attended. Specter earlier met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister David Levy, but Netanyahu's office declined to confirm an Israeli radio report that Specter was carrying a message from Netanyahu on the resumption of peace talks.

According to an adviser, Netanyahu is insisting on resuming talks without preconditions, but has not ruled out territorial compromise in the Golan Heights. Al-Sharaa said in talks in Paris on Tuesday that Syria was willing to return to the negotiating table to discuss the land-for-peace formula and to pick up the talks where they left off last February.

#### Second deal

TURKEY and Israel signed another accord on defence technology cooperation yesterday. The deal is the second move this year towards stepping up Turkish-Israeli cooperation in the military field. Signed in Ankara by the director-general of Israel's Defence Ministry, David Ivry, and Turkey's under-secretary at the Defence Ministry, Tuncer Kitilci, the agreement covers the exchange of technical know-how. It is likely to pave the way for a long-delayed deal worth \$650 million for the Israeli overhaul of 54 Turkish F-4 Phantom jets.

An earlier military agreement, signed in February, allowed Israeli jets to train in Turkish airspace. It provoked protest from Arab countries. Turkey's Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, at the time in opposition, also criticised it.

#### MP in prison

A MEMBER of parliament belonging to the ruling National Democratic Party was sentenced by the Supreme Military Court on Tuesday to six months imprisonment with hard labour for evading conscription into the military.

Reda Abdel-Rahman, an MP for Toukh in the Qalyubiya governorate, was accused of submitting counterfeit certificates exempting him from military service. Abdel-Rahman, 51, was sentenced for the crime of draft-dodging, a charge that has no statute of limitations. However, the forged charges were dropped because the statute of limitations had elapsed.

Before the trial, Abdel-Rahman was stripped of his immunity. By-elections for his seat are expected once parliament reconvenes in October.

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# Mubarak warns again

MENA's fate hangs in the balance. Nevine Khalil reports from Alexandria

President Hosni Mubarak said yesterday that progress toward a comprehensive peace in the Middle East was a "necessary and logical" prelude for the success of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) economic cooperation summit, scheduled to meet in Cairo in November.

Mubarak said the chances of the summit's success would be limited, and some parties might stay away, unless "serious steps are taken toward a just peace in the region."

Mubarak, who spoke to Alexandria University professors, was answering a question about a statement which he made a week ago, drawing attention to the obstacles which the November summit might encounter if the peace process remained stalled.

Mubarak hinted last Thursday that if Israel continued to falter on the peace process, the economic cooperation summit might be cancelled. The remark threw Israeli diplomacy into a frenzy of action, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu telephoning Mubarak shortly

ly afterwards to assure him that progress on the ground would be made soon.

Mubarak said he was sending a message to all concerned parties, stressing the importance of continued commitment to peace and the previously-concluded agreements, particularly on the Palestinian track, in order to ensure the summit's success.

Mubarak expressed hope that positive movement in the direction of peace would be made in the near future, describing it as "the best security guarantee and a logical prelude for the success of economic cooperation."

Answering another question about a conference of Muslim fundamentalists scheduled to open in London early in September, Mubarak expressed surprise that such a conference would be held to bring together the many "advocates of terrorism". "This will not serve the cause of fighting international terrorism," Mubarak said. "Many questions are being raised about this conference and we hope that the coming days will provide answers." (see p. 2)

## Arafat issues strike call

PALESTINIAN leader Yasser Arafat yesterday described as a "declaration of war" Israeli moves to expand Jewish settlements and urged Palestinians throughout Israel and the Occupied Territories to stage a general strike in protest.

The settlement activity is a violation and a crime by the new Israeli leadership and represents a declaration of war against the Palestinian nation," Arafat told a meeting in Ramallah of the Palestinian Legislative Council and other Palestinian political bodies.

"We ask the council to call a 24-hour general strike tomorrow [today] from Rafah to Jenin," he said, referring to the southernmost and northernmost towns under the control of his Palestinian self-rule government.

Arafat urged Israel's Arab citizens to join the protest and called on all Palestinians "to go pray in Jerusalem" on Friday in a further act of defiance against the policies of the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The council agreed to call a strike but only for four hours between 8am and midday.

It was the first time Arafat has called such a protest strike since the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords which launched limited self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. His outburst came a day after Israel announced it would build 1,800 new homes in an ultra-Orthodox settlement in the West Bank, the first such expansion of the settlements since 1992.

"We cannot remain silent or passive in the face of this Israeli insistence on implementing their [settlement] plan," Arafat said, calling on the gathered Palestinian leaders to make combatting settlement expansion "our top priority."

Arafat interrupted his speech to speak by telephone with Dennis Ross, the US coordinator for the Middle East peace process, who has been meeting in Paris with Netanyahu's top policy

adviser, Dore Gold, and Egypt's presidential political adviser Osama El-Baz.

Back at the podium, Arafat said Ross had proposed that Gold and Mahmoud Abbas, Arafat's deputy in the Palestinian Authority, meet today to discuss the settlement crisis and other issues. Arafat did not say if he had agreed to the meeting.

"Dennis told me that the talks were very important and there should be a meeting tomorrow [today] between Dore Gold and Abu Mazen," Arafat said.

He quoted Ross as telling him: "The important thing is the Israelis are prepared to move." Arafat said he replied: "Is this like their previous promises?"

"No, they have good intentions," Arafat quoted Ross as saying.

Returning to his speech, Arafat said that the previous Labour government in Israel, which signed the 1993 and 1995 Oslo Accords granting limited autonomy to the Palestinians, had pledged "not to add even one more house to any settlement."

"Everything that is taking place now is a flagrant violation of the agreements between us," Arafat said.

Palestinian leaders were also angered by Netanyahu's moves to close down Palestinian institutions in disputed East Jerusalem.

The Palestinian Authority reluctantly closed down three affiliated offices in the city over the weekend after Netanyahu threatened to freeze the peace process unless they were shut. And on Tuesday, Israeli authorities demolished a Palestinian community centre under construction in the Arab quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. Police followed up the action yesterday by dismantling a group of tents which local residents had erected on the same site.



## Words from the heart

THE FUNERAL of Ahmed Bahaeddin, who died this week at 69, brought ministers, ambassadors, intellectuals, artists and ordinary people to Omar Makram Mosque on Monday to pay their last respects to one of the towering figures of Egyptian journalism, reports Khaled Dawoud.

President Hosni Mubarak was represented by a personal envoy at the funeral, which brought together representatives from across the political spectrum intent on ignoring their differences to unite in memory of the late Bahaeddin whose writings, for over four decades, expressed "the conscience of the nation".

Mohamed Hassanien Heikal, a close friend of Bahaeddin throughout his long career and the ups and downs of Egyptian politics, was among the first to arrive at the mosque. He took his place alongside Arab ambassadors, who had come to salute Bahaeddin's staunch pan-Arabist stands. Cabinet members Amr Moussa, minister of foreign affairs, Izzat Salam, minister of health, Farouk Hosni, minister of culture, Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin, minister of education, and Zakaria Aziz, director of the President's Office Ibrahim Saeed, chairman of the Press Syndicate and head of the Arab Journalists' Union,

was in Damascus at the time of the funeral and therefore could not attend.

"Ahmed Bahaeddin meant a lot as a writer, as one of the foremost thinkers of Egypt and the Arab world. He was a great man, and his loss, therefore, is greatly felt," said Amr Moussa.

"Commenting on history is a very difficult task. And now Bahaeddin is himself a part of history," said the Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni. "But he will not be forgotten, and the principles for which he fought will always be with us."

Actor Adel Imam and the film directors Youssif Chahine and Atef Salem were among the many figures drawn from the worlds of the arts and entertainment who sat among the crowds at the funeral. Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the leftist Tegmu Party, whom Bahaeddin supported openly in the 1990 election campaign, was among the scores of leftist figures who thronged the mosque in a spontaneous show of affection for a man who, by virtue of his pen, had entered people's hearts.

Above: Ahmed Bahaeddin, painted by the celebrated portraitist Sabry Ragheb, from the collection of Al-Ahram.

## Concern over London meeting

A conference of Islamist militants will be held in London early September despite Egyptian protests. Amr Abdel-Samie, in the British capital, and Jallian Malawi, in Cairo, report

Egypt has publicised its fears that a conference of Islamists opening in London next month would amount to a gathering of "terrorists" plotting to overthrow the legitimate governments of several Arab and Islamic states. But British officials argue that the conference cannot be stopped as long as British law has not been violated by any of the participants.

About 14,000 Islamist hardliners are expected to take part in the "International Conference Rally for Revival," which is organised by Omar Bakri's newly-established Al-Muhajiroun (emigrants) group, a splinter faction of the Islamic Liberation Party. The party was led by Bakri, a 35-year-old man of Syrian origin, before he broke ranks last January to establish Al-Muhajiroun.

Richard Macepeace, deputy head of the British mission in Cairo, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday by Nihad Abdel-Latif, assistant to the foreign minister, who expressed the Egyptian government's concern about the conference and requested additional information, a spokesman for the British Embassy said.

Macepeace assured Abdel-Latif that this was a privately organised conference with which the British government had nothing to do. The spokesman said Macepeace called at the Foreign Ministry again yesterday to provide the requested information. However, the spokesman refused to divulge its nature, describing it only as "background information."

The Islamic Liberation Party had organised its own annual rally last Saturday at Earl's Court in London under the title "Islam and Israel's occupation of Palestine." About 1,000 people who showed up for the

conference heard speeches lambasting the United States for its policy of supporting Israel.

The forthcoming conference of Al-Muhajiroun is expected to hear videotaped speeches by Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian millionaire believed to be the financier of militant groups, and Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, leader of the Egyptian Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya. The latter was convicted earlier this year by an American court for conspiracy to blow up New York landmarks and sentenced to life in prison.

Those likely to attend in person may include Adel Tawfiq Seri of Egypt's Jihad organisation, who had been sentenced to death in absentia for a failed attempt in 1993 on the life of former Prime Minister Eddi Sidiqi. Seri, an Egyptian, had been granted political asylum in Britain.

Another is Abdel-Meguid Abdel-Bari, also of the Jihad organisation, convicted in a foiled attempt to bomb Khan El-Khalili, Cairo's largest tourist bazaar. Abdel-Bari who is suspected of spearheading other attempts to bomb tourist sites, was also granted political asylum in Britain.

The London conference is likely to turn into a forum for organising extremist activity against Arab governments in the name of Islam," said a top Egyptian security official who asked to remain anonymous.

The timing of the conference, the official added, could not be worse because it is taking place "at a time when an international anti-terrorism campaign is being launched under the leadership of the United States."

And yet, militant activity is on the rise in Britain, the official said, noting that, in exile, the radicals have set up media centres that issue bulletins against the governments

water level is expected to reach almost 180 metres, and the excess water will be drained through the Toshki spillway which lies west of the lake.

"This year's flood will be higher than that of any previous year, and will bring in not less than 100 billion cubic metres of water," said Minister for Public Works and Water Resources Abdell-Hadi Radi at a press conference on Tuesday. The lake's water level rose to 175 metres this week, the highest level reached since the construction of the Aswan High Dam in 1970. By October, the

He added that Egypt is willing to assist Sudan in combating the floods if Khartoum asks for help.

## High waters

AN UNPRECEDENTED rise in Lake Nasser's water level promises to keep Egypt self-sufficient for the next seven years, but threatens to cause serious flooding in Sudan. "This year's flood will be higher than that of any previous year, and will bring in not less than 100 billion cubic metres of water," said Minister for Public Works and Water Resources Abdell-Hadi Radi at a press conference on Tuesday. The lake's water level

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# Cairo sounds a warning bell

President Hosni Mubarak sent a warning to Israel last Thursday: If progress is not made in the peace process, the regional economic summit scheduled for next November in Cairo might be cancelled. The warning appears to have sent tremors reverberating across the border to the Israeli government. In effect, Mubarak threatened to dash Israel's hopes that closer forms of regional economic cooperation would be forged soon — a primary target, from the Israeli perspective, of the peace effort.

Addressing over 2,000 university students and professors in Alexandria, Mubarak said that "if progress is not made in the peace process and signed agreements are not implemented, the consequences will be colossal." He pressed the issue further: "How can the Palestinians wait any longer, and how can the economic conference be held?" If Israel does not agree to a revival of the peace process? "If the status quo continues, it will affect the conference and many states in the region will not attend," Mubarak warned.

The Egyptian president's threat brought a quick reaction from Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reportedly shaken by Mubarak's tone, telephoned the president soon after the speech and assured him that talks with the Palestinians would resume "in the very near future". The Israeli media announced later that Netanyahu would be meeting soon with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. Despite Netanyahu's earlier assertion that he would hold talks with Arafat only when he deemed it necessary for Israel's security, the Israeli press reported that the two are expected to meet before Netanyahu's visit to the US, scheduled for 10 Sep-

tember. But as of Tuesday, Arafat had yet to receive an official invitation for a meeting with Netanyahu. Earlier in the week, the Israeli prime minister told Israeli television that the Palestinian track was "starting to move; it is simply moving differently."

Israeli President Ezer Weizman also said he would meet with Arafat within the coming fortnight. With Netanyahu at his side, Weizman told a press conference on Monday that he would respond to a "distress" letter sent to him by Arafat and invite him to his home.

On the same day, Netanyahu dispatched his senior political aide, Dore Gold, to Paris to talk with President Mubarak's top political adviser Osama El-Baz and US peace coordinator Dennis Ross. And Cairo will be receiving Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy on Sunday for "honest and quick" discussions of the situation at hand, especially Israel's position on the peace process and the November eco-

nomic summit.

"We are looking forward to this visit as we have a lot of issues which we need to discuss," Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said. "We also want to affirm that we, as Arabs, are committed to the peace option."

In Paris on Tuesday, Egyptian and Israeli officials discussed ways of reviving the stalled process and preparations for the regional economic summit, the third of its kind after Casablanca and Amman. "This is still very preliminary," stressed El-Baz after a meeting with Gold, while Gold described the same meeting as "very good", adding: "I think we are deepening the understanding between the different countries." The two met with Ross later in the day.

But despite these overtures, Israel continued to send out confusing signals. It announced on Tuesday that 1,800 new homes would be built in the West Bank. In a clear violation of the new government's verbal commitment to peace, and Ne-

tanyahu's phone conversation with Mubarak, Israel authorised the immediate construction of 900 apartments near Ramallah.

The move is the first attempt to increase the population of the settlements since Netanyahu lifted a freeze earlier this month on settlement building in the Occupied Territories imposed by the previous government.

As Egypt pressed its efforts to revive the peace process, Moussa travelled to Damascus on Tuesday to deliver a message from Mubarak to Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad.

Moussa said that Cairo is demanding that Israel "clearly and quickly" proceed on all tracks in line with the decisions and agreements made in the past. Egypt would not acknowledge superficial manoeuvres in the media, "but only serious and real moves implementing what has been agreed upon."

Moussa reiterated Mubarak's doubts regarding "regional activities" connected to the process.

"What the president announced [concerning the summit] is clear and precise," Moussa said, "and represents the official and factual Egyptian position."

Moussa said that Mubarak had announced a grace period for the new Israeli government shortly after Netanyahu's election in May, "but up till now, Israeli policy has not budged."

During the Cairo Arab Summit last June, Arab leaders affirmed that if Israel "deviates from the bases or principles of the peace process, or retreats from its commitments and agreements, or procrastinates in implementing them, [it] will bear sole and full responsibility for this situation."

The Arab League, in turn, threw its weight behind Mubarak. Arab League Spokesman Talaat Hamed reaffirmed the link between holding the economic summit and progress in the peace process.

Hamed told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid was emphasising that "the desired regional cooperation is strongly linked to resolving all the political problems related to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian issue." It was not possible to discuss a Middle East market or signing joint projects at a time when Israel continues to occupy Arab land, he added.

Hamed said the general secretary of the Arab League regarded Mubarak's warnings as a clear message to Israel that it must take positive steps to show respect for the peace accords signed earlier, especially the land-for-peace formula. "If Israel sticks to its intransigent stand, the incentives for cancelling the summit will outweigh those for holding it," he said.



Amr Moussa

Osama El-Baz

David Levy

## Jars contain mummies' secrets

An X-ray analysis of four canopy jars found in a nobleman's tomb at Dahshour, 30km south of Giza, has proved that they contained material used by the ancients for mummification. The jars were found this week by workers doing routine excavation work on the tomb which dates back to the Middle Kingdom. Egyptologists believe the find may bring them closer to unravelling the secrets of the religious ritual which the Ancient Egyptian clergy had kept under close wraps.

According to Nasr Iskander, a forensic pathologist specialising in the dissection of mummies, the jars were brought last Monday to an antiquities laboratory in the Egyptian Museum where they underwent X- and ultraviolet-ray tests. "These tests, in which a X-ray diffractometer was used, proved that three jars contained the remains of material used for mummification, such as nitrate, sodium chloride, potassium and other chemicals. The remains of internal organs made up the contents of the fourth," he said.

Iskander said, however, that this was not the first time that material used for mummification had been recovered. In 1947, some canopy jars were found in a tomb in Saqqara. They contained the remains of internal organs mixed with material used in mummification, he said.

This discovery did not provide complete information on all the materi-

als used in the ancient ritual but it encouraged a group of Egyptologists to test the formula that became known then on dead animals. A duck which they mummified, using the available information, is on display at the Egyptian Museum, Iskander said.

The latest discovery, by yielding fresh information, will complete the circle first charted in 1947. Hopefully, the full details of the mummification process will become known to us," he said.

According to archaeologist Zahi Hawass, head of the Giza Plateau, mummification was a religious ritual conducted by Ancient Egyptian priests who kept the secrets of the entire process closely guarded. "These secrets were known only to them. This explains why on papyri or inscriptions were left behind, explaining the formula used in mummification. The priests insisted on secrecy presumably because the process was

rewarding to them in terms of profit and social prestige," Hawass said. Abd-Halim Noureddin, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said mummification techniques were perfected by the ancients in the Middle Kingdom, particularly during the period spanning the 17th to the 21st dynasties. "Before then, the techniques were primitive and after, in the New Kingdom, the techniques took a downward curve, with the priests paying greater attention to the outer appearance of the mummy, by wrapping it in fine cloth, for example," he said. "This explains why some mummies dating back to the New Kingdom are in bad condition while Middle Kingdom mummies are usually in good shape."

Peter Arnold, head of the Metropolitan Museum mission which is carrying out the excavation at Dahshour, said the mummification material which has been recovered will help unravel some of the secrets of the process. In cooperation with the University of Maryland, this formula will be tested on a dead human body which will be mummified in the same way used by the Ancient Egyptians.

Since the burial chamber of the nobleman's tomb remains to be opened, Arnold expects more finds once the new season begins in September.

## Martian desert in Egypt

Egypt has been invited to contribute to a US-Russian exploration flight to Mars planned for the beginning of the next century, reports Galal Nassar

Egypt has been invited by American and Russian space exploration institutes to make a contribution to a flight to the planet Mars, tentatively scheduled for the year 2001, according to Egyptian-American scientist Farouq El-Baz.

Egypt's participation may take the form of designing and manufacturing equipment for collecting soil and rock samples from Mars' surface, said El-Baz, a remote-sensing specialist who works for Boston University and the American space programme. An American-Russian delegation will visit Cairo in mid-September to discuss Egypt's proposed role with experts at the defence and scientific research ministries.

In El-Baz's view, there are two reasons why Egypt should be involved in the project. The first is that its scientists have good experience in using remote-sensing equipment — he recalled an Egyptian-American project in the mid-1980s to photograph the inside of a sealed pit near Khufu's (Cheops') Pyramid in Giza that contained a dismantled "solar boat".

Egypt's other advantage is the striking similarity between the geological features of the Western Desert and the surface of Mars. Both appear to have had rivers and lakes, formed by torrential rains, in ancient times. In both cases, the rains seem to have been followed by a drought, causing rocks and dunes fields to emerge and dot the landscape. This makes the Western Desert an ideal testing site for Mars exploration equipment, El-Baz believes.

It was a trip to the southwest of the Western Desert by 16 scientists, including El-Baz, in 1978, which established the similarity of the region's desert landscapes with forms identified on the Martian landscape. The two-week journey started at Kharga Oasis and proceeded south-southwest to Bir Tarifawi, west towards the Gulf Kebir Plateau and then to Gebel Uweinat on the border between Egypt, Libya and Sudan.

According to Mohamed El-Hennawy, the Egyptian Geological Survey Authority, the similarities between the features of sections of Mars' surface and an area east of Uweinat are striking — to the extent that the two landscapes are virtually identical.

American scientists announced last week that a meteorite, found in Antarctica in 1984, bears traces of primitive life that may have existed on Mars billions of years ago.

Meanwhile, *Fingerprints of the Gods*, a book currently being serialised by a London newspaper, claims not only that there was life on Mars, but that life took the form of an advanced civilization. Pictures published in the book, taken by the American spaceship Viking about 20 years ago, purport to show pyramids and a sphinx-like face similar to the monuments at Giza. But Egyptian archaeologists, including Zahi Hawass, director of the Giza Plateau, said the Mars "pyramids and sphinx" were probably geological formations that took shape over millions of years. He dismissed any claim that structures similar to the Giza monuments exist on Mars as the product of a "wild imagination".

## Tighter security for banks

Following two armed robberies blamed on Islamic militants, security is to be tightened at banks and restrictions on gun ownership are reported to have been relaxed. Jaitan Halawani investigates

Tighter security measures are to be enforced for the protection of banks — the latest target of Islamic militants apparently bent on replenishing their coffers. The decision was taken last week at a meeting between Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi and representatives of foreign and local banks, headed by National Bank of Egypt president Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz.

According to Abdel-Aziz, the question of security assumed new urgency after armed militants held up a branch of Misr Bank at Al-Ayyat in Giza on 5 August, killing one person and wounding three and fleeing with more than £500,000 in cash. "The attack on Misr Bank revealed our deficiency," Abdel-Aziz said. "We need to update our security apparatus. We need a proper connection with the Interior Ministry, and additional security inside and outside the banks."

Following a second robbery on 17 August, in

which the militants raided three jewellery stores at Tahta in Sohag Governorate, 460km south of Cairo, it was reported in the Arabic-language press that the Interior Ministry had decided to relax restrictions on licensing weapons for civilians. After killing two Coptic jewellers and wounding three other people, the militants escaped in a hijacked truck with 15kg of gold, worth £600,000, and £15,000 in cash.

Sources at the Interior Ministry said the militants had apparently turned to robbery after the government succeeded in cutting off their funding from abroad.

According to Maj Gen Mustafa Abdel-Qader, assistant to the interior minister, the new plan calls for banks to hire security guards trained and armed by the Interior Ministry as part of a nationwide effort to "protect investment in Egypt and bolster the economy". The type of weapons to be used by these guards were under consideration, along with addi-

tional security measures including setting up a security grid to connect banks with police stations and the Interior Ministry, Abdel-Qader said. According to Abdel-Aziz, responsibility for financing the security firm would rest with the various banks and insurance companies.

"It is about time that the economic institutions take into consideration the importance of using high-tech methods to make their offices secure," Abdel-Qader said. "Security is an expensive product directly linked with development and investment."

The new security measures will begin at the bank's entrance. "Sophisticated metal detectors will be installed at the gates of every bank, and there will be monitors on each floor," said Abdel-Qader. "Highly-trained, plainclothes guards will be deployed inside and outside the banks."

Provincial branches will also be provided with plainclothes guards as well as police escorts for their

cash-transferring vehicles. According to Abdel-Qader, "These banks made themselves an easy target to terrorists by transporting large amounts of money on unguarded motorcycles." He added that "for greater security, dealings in cash should be replaced by the use of credit cards."

Abdel-Qader denied the reports that restrictions on the private ownership of guns, imposed before parliamentary elections at the end of last year, were to be lifted. Many weapons' licences have been revoked under these restrictions.

The Interior Ministry had only acted to "rationalise" the ownership of personal weapons, he said, adding that the restrictions applied only to automatic weapons, whose possession should be confined to security men. "Pistols are the only weapons allowed in self-defence and licences for their ownership continue to be issued."

## FGM claims another life

Human rights activists charge that female genital mutilation, which claimed the life of a teenage schoolgirl this week, continues to be widely practised despite a ministerial ban. Dina Ezzat reports

A 14-year-old schoolgirl died in the governorate of Qalyubiya, just north of Cairo, earlier this week after she was subjected to a female genital mutilation (FGM), at her father's request, by a licensed doctor. The death of Amina Abdel-Hamid, for which the doctor denied responsibility, was seized upon by human rights activists to show that FGM, popularly known as female circumcision, continues to be widely practised despite a ban clamped by Health Minister Ismail Sallam.

The doctor, Rabie Ibrahim Mahgoub, was arrested and then released on £500 bail. Putting the blame on the girl's father, the doctor said that he should have been informed before the surgery that the girl suffered from a heart condition. The father did not inform him and, as a result, the doctor said he injected the girl with a tranquilliser that might have caused her heart to fail.

The versions of the incident provided by the doctor and the father were at variance. The doctor claimed the operation was performed at a small local hospital, while the father insisted it took place at his house. The father told police that the girl did not regain consciousness after the operation and that he sought the doctor's advice twice. The doctor said that when he left the girl, after the operation, she was in a "normal" condition. The girl's death came less than a month after Sallam issued a decree banning all members of the medical profession from performing the surgery.

Sallam, as well as his senior aides, sides comment on the tragedy. "I am busy. I do not have time to talk on the phone," said Dr Moshira El-Shafai, director of the ministry's Reproductive Health and Family Planning Department.

During the past month, members of the Female Genital Mutilation Combat Task Force — a non-governmental organisation (NGO) — and the women's committee of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) repeatedly complained that the ministerial ban was largely ig-

nored by doctors and hospitals alike. They claimed that dozens of girls were subjected to the operation for the removal of their clitoris and sometimes the rest of their external reproductive organs. Feminists and human rights activists warned that since the practice is a source of income for doctors and nurses, the ministry has to keep them under close watch to guarantee compliance.

The ministry insisted, however, that the ban is generally observed. "Any doctor who does not abide by a ministerial decree could face legal action by the ministry," said Ismail Seddik, legal adviser to the minister of health.

The decree was issued a few days after Sara, an 11-year-old, died of internal bleeding at a Cairo hospital to which she was rushed after a village barber botched an operation for the mutilation of her genitals.

Despite the decree, the operation is still performed publicly and shamelessly in and out of public hospitals. The latest death was only inevitable," said Maha Attiya of the EOH.

Some members of the medical profession did not conceal their opposition to the ministerial ban, sending a letter of protest to Sallam. The letter was signed by 40 doctors from various parts of Upper Egypt. They said compliance with the ban was not warranted because it violated the spirit of Shari'a which, they claimed, stipulated that FGM is a "must" for all Muslim women.

The ministry ignored the protest. "We are not going to be intimidated by this attitude," said El-Shafai, a few days before Amina's death. The head of the ministry's Reproductive Health Department added: "When we [the ministry] took the decision to combat the practice, we anticipated that there would be some sort of resistance. But again that is not going to kill our enthusiasm because we know we are doing the right thing and we are prepared to go through the battle."

Acting separately from the Upper Egypt doctors, gynaecologist Moussa Fawzi filed a lawsuit against Sallam for imposing the ban. "The practice is good for the woman and it is ordained by Islam," Fawzi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "If the parts that we circumcise are left intact, the women would not be clean and would suffer from an undesirable [high] sexual urge."

Although many Muslim clergymen, led by the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, believe that FGM is not mandated by Islam, Fawzi insists that only those who link the ritual to Islam know what they are talking about. "As a Muslim, I am entitled to embrace the opinion that I believe to be sound and, as a doctor, I believe that banning the practice will force it to go underground and endanger the lives of many girls who will be denied the professional care of a doctor," he said.

The lawsuit will be considered by an administrative court, but no date has been set yet for the start of hearings. "Once hearings begin, other doctors, university professors and civil servants who share my view will join in against the minister of health," Fawzi said.

The practice, to which an estimated 3,600 girls are subjected every day, had been briefly condoned at government-run hospitals by the outgoing minister of health, Ali Abdel-Fattah. Under NGO pressure, Abdel-Fattah reversed his own decision shortly before he was replaced by Sallam in a cabinet change last January.

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# Liberal critic welcomed as censor

Ali Abu Shadi, a cinema critic known for his liberal views and broad-mindedness, was appointed last week by Culture Minister Faouzi Hosni to head the Censorship Board of Artistic Works, a post which has been vacant since April. Entertainers, whose relations with former chief censor Doreya Sharafeddin appear to have been strained, urged Abu Shadi to show greater understanding in dealing with them. The new chief censor responded by promising to pursue a liberal policy.

Before his appointment, Abu Shadi held a high position in the General Authority for Cultural Palaces, an affiliate of the Ministry of Culture. Abu Shadi is also the author of several books such as *Classics of the Arab Cinema and Studies of Documentary Films*.

Last Thursday was Abu Shadi's first day on the new job. He met with his top aides to define a new policy for the censorship board. "Upgrading the board's performance will be given priority," Abu Shadi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "A grade system will be introduced for evaluating the work of censors and promoting the promising ones."

Greater freedom of expression will be allowed, he said. Objective political criticism will be tolerated and works which do not violate the rules of decency will not be banned.

Abu Shadi defended the existence of a censorship board as a necessity in the current circumstances. If we manage to broaden the limited margin of freedom allowed to us, then

Entertainers breathed a sigh of relief after a liberal cinema critic was appointed chief censor. Mona El-Nahas reports.

there will be no need for such a board," he said.

Stage director Samir El-Aasfouri said the concept of censorship should change. "Censorship should serve art instead of acting as an obstacle in its way," he said.

El-Aasfouri urged Abu Shadi to be wary of his assistants. "If he listens to their nonsense, they may push him towards a direct confrontation with intellectuals as they did with the former censor," he said.

Cinema actress Leila Elwi said the majority of entertainers were fed up with the narrow-mindedness of censors. "We need greater freedom and I hope that Abu Shadi will be liberal," she said.

The post of chief censor has been vacant since Sharafeddin submitted her resignation in April, triggering a controversy on the pages of the Arabic-language press. Sharafeddin said at the time she decided to quit to protest the continuous interference of her seniors in her work. Sources at the Ministry of Culture counter-charged that Sharafeddin often went over the head of her superiors. They described some of

her decisions as "stubborn and harsh".

One source claimed she withdrew after fearing she would be dismissed.

Entertainers felt that many of Sharafeddin's decisions were purposely directed against them. One of those decisions was to prohibit bellydancing in theatrical performances.

The decision, which took effect for barely three days, was to ban *Dastour Ya Ayadha*, a comedy satirizing the constitutional rights of citizens, on the grounds that the actors did not stick to the script approved by the censorship in advance.

"The ban was clamped out of the blue after the play had been running successfully for a whole month," said author Mahmoud El-Toukhi. "It was lifted three days afterwards

under pressure from the majority of theatre and cinema workers."

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The Censorship Board was established in 1914 to examine works of art and cut out parts which may threaten the security of the state. It was supervised by security bodies until 1952 when it became an affiliate of the Ministry of Culture. A new law in 1955 defined the role of censorship as protecting moral and religious values as well as state interests. Almost 40 years later amendments were introduced, stiffening penalties against censorship offenses.



El-Toukhi expressed the hope that Abu Shadi would bring about a radical change in the censorship's role, showing greater respect for creativity and freedom of expression. El-Toukhi said he also hoped that the liberalism of Abu Shadi, whom he praised as a "cultured and courageous" critic, would not suffer as a result of the constraints of the new post.

Script writer Rafiq El-Sabbani, a strong opponent of censorship, was similarly optimistic about the choice of Abu Shadi. "Censorship, a reflection of the social conscience, should act to encourage creativity. Consequently, censors should show flexibility and understanding in approaching works of art. I'm sure that Abu Shadi, who is familiar with our needs, is capable of doing this."

The appointment of the new censor took about four months and sources at the Supreme Council for Culture attributed the delay to a meticulous search for the right person. During that period, the council's chairman, Gaber Asfour, provisionally assumed the chief censor's responsibilities.

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## The right to a fair trial

**Awad El-Morr,**  
Chief Justice of the  
Supreme Constitutional Court, examines the safeguards necessary to ensure a fair trial

In Case No 13 for the 12th judicial year, decided on the 2 February, 1996 the Court entered for the first time into a new arena in which the right to a fair trial and its constituent elements were thoroughly examined and outlined.

In this case the office of the public prosecutor indicted the petitioner upon allegations that he knowingly possessed and dealt with smuggled foreign commodities.

Under paragraph two of Article 121 of Law No 66 (1963) concerning customs duties, the violation of which represented one of the counts with which the accused was charged — contraband shall be deemed as the possession of foreign commodities with the intention of trading knowing that the commodities were smuggled. Such knowledge shall be presumed if the dealer in whose possession these commodities were found failed to submit documents proving that the respective duties had been paid in full.

In challenging the validity of this paragraph before the Court of Merits, the petitioner based his argument on the premise that the provision in question established a legal presumption by which the non-submission of specific documents was taken as a substitute for a criminal intent in contradiction with the assumption of innocence and the requirements of a fair trial.

In deciding the case, the court invalidated the challenged provision, arguing:

- that the Constitution is the paramount law of the land which demarcates the constituent elements of the regime of governance, as well as basic freedoms and rights. Competence attributed to the legislature thereby, confines its main powers to the adoption of legislation and not to invade or supersede the powers to which other branches of the government are entitled.

- that the right to a fair trial proclaimed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is also enshrined and protected by Article 67 of the Constitution which extends that guarantee to all controversies irrespective of the nature of the subject-matter involved therein, thus reiterating a norm that has been applied in democratic countries as a systematic and determinative pattern for conduct.

- within that norm, the Court observed, certain fundamental guarantees fall which ensure an integrated concept of justice, mirroring civilised contemporary standards. While this concept raises questions as to the formation of the respective court adjudicating the subject matter under its consideration, its substantive and procedural rules, and the manner of their application, light ought to be shed in particular on criminal accusations because of their direct linkage with personal freedom qualified by the Constitution as a natural right.

- a criminal conviction, the court went on, carries with it the most serious restrictions and even threatens the right to life and thus demands a due balance between the individual's right to liberty on the one hand and the defence of society's interests on the other. As a corollary to this balance, and in consequence of the adversarial system of criminal justice, an indictment must clearly define the respective charge and all other elements attached thereto, including the nature of the offence and its related evidence.

- that due account ought to be given to the requirement that the trial court, acting as an independent and impartial body, should conduct its proceedings without undue delay and conduct fairly the necessary investigations in order to arrive at a rational determination of the question of guilt or innocence to the light of all mitigating factors and aggravating circumstances, without prejudice either to the presumption of innocence or to the right to counsel, both of which are articulated and specified by the constitution in articles 67 and 69 respectively.

- that innocence is more properly called an assumption as opposed to a presumption. It does not, the court pointed out, rest on any other proved facts, but is assumed. In addition, the presumption of innocence, being connected with the proof of guilt, and disassociated from the prescribed kinds of punishment, lies at the heart of all criminal proceedings and dominates the trial in all its phases and throughout the proper administration of criminal justice. Understood in this sense, all individuals, whether suspects or accused, are beneficiaries thereof and, unless clearly rebutted by irrefutable evidence at which the court arrives, the presumption stands unchallenged. The presumption of innocence, a crystal-clear, undisputed norm and a prerequisite exacted by the Constitution against arbitrariness and prejudice, is not intended to provide a shield for the accused, but to secure acquittal whenever a criminal charge has not been proven beyond reasonable doubt.

- that what matters in the protection of human rights and freedoms is the preservation of their core and practical outcome, with the consequence that tangible safeguards in the process of a fair trial shall restrain intolerable acts directed against personal freedom without the due process of law, and provide the accused with the required sanctuary for his security.

- that the fair trial is an integrated system viewing human dignity as one of its main goals, suppressing unjustified encroachments thereon, and branding all deviations from the purposes and methods of criminal law as determined by social values of a given society at a given time.

- that the sanctity of private life and the severity of restrictions affecting personal security have led civilised countries to restrain the authority to inflict pain, taking into account that the conviction of the accused at whatever cost and by whatever means runs contrary to the effective administration of justice. Indeed the recognition of a minimum standard of rights attributable to the accused in the course of his trial figures out inalienable values, which may be neither dispensed with nor conceded. Such rights, even of procedural nature, do have a substantial effect on the outcome of trial.

- that contraband is an intentional crime in respect of which all the constituent elements thereof must be materially established before, and ascertained by, the trial court. Therefore, a legally assumed element of this crime, implies the legislature's implication in matters constitutionally attributed to the judicial branch, in violation of the principle of the separation of powers. Initially, the criminal intent of contraband has to be proven beyond all reasonable doubt just as much as other elements of that crime.

However, under the challenged provision, that intent was indirectly established by a legal, enforceable presumption which clearly states that whenever the possessor of foreign commodities for trade fails to produce documents proving the payment of duties, his knowledge that these commodities have been smuggled is presumed.

In order to protect the vital domain of personal liberty, and to ensure the effectiveness of the presumption of innocence in all criminal prosecutions, the accused must benefit from certain compulsory procedural safeguards, including the right to be confronted with the witnesses against him, to obtain witnesses in his favour, and to have the assistance of a counsel. In defiance of all these rights, the aforesaid legal presumption prescribed by the challenged provision has been arbitrarily tailored to waive the presumption of innocence, thus releasing the district attorney of his obligation to clearly prove the mental element (*mens rea*) of the crime of smuggled merchandise; evading the requirements of a fair trial; abridging the right to counsel; and finally intruding upon competencies allocated to and assigned for the different branches of government, in violation of articles 41, 57, 69, 86 and 165 of the Constitution.



photo: Antoine Albert

## Whither Abul-Ela?

In the latest about-turn in decision-making over the future of Abul-Ela Bridge, the government has decided to move the aging construction to a new location. But a new site has yet to be decided on, reports Gilan Shahine

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The decision that the bridge was no longer safe and should be "retired" was reached by a group of experts from the Ministry of Housing and the Arab Contractors Company, who carried out a thorough technical inspection at the direction of Housing Minister Mohamed Ibrahim Suleiman. Pictures and a video film showing how the bridge has degenerated were attached to the group's report. Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri approved the report's recommendation, ordering the relocation of the bridge "before a catastrophe takes place", according to an official.

"Relocation is inevitable and final this time," asserted Ibrahim Meleib, head of the Bridges and Specialised Structures Department at the Arab Contractors Company, and in charge of the relocation project. "Experts are in agreement that the bridge is beyond repair and moved to a new location, where it will be reassembled, officials say. But no decision has yet been taken on the new site, raising fears that after dismantling, the bridge will never be capable of being reassembled, and might even end up in the hands of scrap dealers."

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The bridge is endangering the lives of the thousands passing over it every day," declared Sayeda Said, a member of the board of engineers in charge of completing the 15th of May Flyover. "We cannot even have second thoughts about Abul-Ela's relocation."

The bridge was described as dilapidated as early as 1968. Some repairs were done then, but work was discontinued. "In 1972, the decision was taken to replace Abul-Ela with the 15th of May Flyover, and the bridge was left to deteriorate," explained Meleib.

According to Salih El-Iraki, a civil engineer with the Arab Contractors Company, the experts' report concluded that corrosion and rust had penetrated 50 per cent of the diagonal and vertical parts of the bridge. Plates binding these parts are also corroded with rust, and rivets have become loose and fallen off. The top section is full of holes and the steel plates of the bridge's floor are seriously corroded, causing its surface to be bumpy and uneven.

"The bridge is endangering the lives of the thousands passing over it every day," declared Sayeda Said, a member of the board of engineers in charge of completing the 15th of May Flyover. "We cannot even have second thoughts about Abul-Ela's relocation."

Relocation has been suggested more than once during the past few years, but the bridge's deterioration was not always the principal reason. Abul-Ela stands in the way of the completion of the second stage of the 15th of May Flyover, which will include an across-the-Nile section of a metro line connecting Shobra Al-Kheima and Giza. If Abul-Ela remained in place, an underwater tunnel would have to be built for the metro, at a cost of LE200 million.

When the relocation idea was first floated, Mahmud El-Shenif, then governor of Cairo and now minister of local government, suggested that the bridge be turned into an open air museum where artists would exhibit their works.

Relocation, however, ran into budgetary problems. Last year, it would have cost LE15 million, a figure that rose to LE17 million this year. None of the concerned government departments — the Governorate of Cairo and the ministries of housing, culture and local government — seemed to be ready to put up the necessary funds. But the problem was finally ironed out when Cairo Governorate pledged to pay for the relocation.

When a decision was taken last year to move Abul-Ela to a stretch of the Nile in front of the World Trade Centre, relocation plans ran into opposition for technical reasons. Engineers warned that if the bridge were dismantled, it would be very difficult to reassemble. Rivers were said to be too rusty to be fixed again.

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Edited by Wadie Kirolos

## New lease on financing

Financial leasing firms, writes Amina El-Otefy, offer some investors financing that banks do not have the legal framework to provide

Although introduced into the Egyptian market nearly one year ago, the concept of financial leasing has yet to catch on. The system, brought about through the Financial Leasing Law of 1995 as part of the government's economic reform package, is designed to facilitate the financing of projects by providing assets such as equipment and buildings, which can be leased instead of purchased.

The law allowed for the creation of financial leasing companies, which are legal entities which may be individuals, corporate or partnership companies, whose task is to provide funding for investors who could not raise enough capital to purchase a needed asset. In such cases, a financial leasing company would purchase the asset and lease it to the project holders. If the assets are movable, like machinery, the purchase is done through a supplier. But in the case of buildings and other immovable assets, the building is constructed by a contractor, and the financial leasing company is the titleholder. The asset is then leased out, over a period of time, with payments made in instalments at a rate that covers the price of the asset plus a profit margin for the company.

Once the leasing contract between the financial leasing company and the project has expired, the project owners have the option of purchasing the asset, or the financial leasing company can lease it out again.

In order for a bank to engage in financial leasing activities, it must obtain prior approval from the Central Bank of Egypt. Securing approval is imperative, given that the Banking and Credit Law prohibits banks from dealing in movable or immovable assets either through purchase, sale or barter.

The new law also enables foreigners to import equipment for leasing, which is an exception to import laws which prohibit foreigners from engaging in import activities. Financial leasing firms enjoy a five-year tax holiday on profits generated from their business.

One may question why a project may elect to finance its assets through financial leasing instead of going to the banks for a loan. The answer is simple. Financial leasing companies provide an invaluable source of funding for project owners who lack the necessary collateral to secure financing through a bank. These firms are able to provide 100 per cent financing by the fact that they are the owners of the asset. This is not the case with the banks, which usually require a financial leverage with a ratio of liabilities to net worth of 1:1.

Moreover, the financial leasing company does not require any kind of security against its services, through mortgaging the assets or pledging of deposits. Its only guarantee is maintaining ownership of the assets leased to the project, contrary to banks which rarely provide funds with no security.

Finally, they offer cheaper financing terms. While banks charge a high interest rate and commissions on loans, these companies require only the rental price plus a mark-up for a reasonable profit margin.

The writer is a lawyer with Shalakany law office.

# Privatisation picks up speed

The government plans to sell another 50 public sector companies over the next few months. Many analysts argue it is about time. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

In an attempt to accelerate the privatisation process, the Ministerial Committee for Privatisation (MCP), headed by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, decided earlier this month to sell off 50 state-owned companies. While 75 per cent of the shares of eight of these companies are to be put up for public subscription this month, the remaining companies will be sold over the next four months. The estimated total value of these shares is LE900 million. On the block are the Memphis Pharmaceuticals and Chemicals Company, the Arab Drug Company, El-Nasr for Utilities and Installation, Egyptian Metallic Construction Company (Metallica), the Arab Company for Transistors and Electrical Equipment (Telenis), Shebin El-Kom Spinning and Weaving, Egyptian Starch, Yeast and Detergent and the Middle and West Delta Flour Mills.

During an MCP meeting held last Sunday, the committee also approved another list of 100 companies to be privatised in 1997. Atef Ebeid, the minister of the public sector, stated that the government aims to generate revenue totalling as much as LE5 billion from the sale of the first 50 state-owned companies.

While government officials and some analysts welcomed the move as giving the privatisation programme a much-needed push, others argued that the recent burst of activity on the part of the government was triggered by pressure exerted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Government officials, however, state that the recent move is a continuation of El-Ganzouri's decision last February to privatise 72 public sector companies.

In an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Mokhtar Khattab, an adviser to Atef Ebeid and a member of the MCP, said that El-Ganzouri's decision to privatisate 50 companies falls in line with the government's plan to eventually move to a free-market economy.

"In light of this philosophy, the MCP adopted two basic criteria in its choice of companies on the new privatisation list," said Khattab. "The first of the two includes the activity of the company in terms of whether it is part of a strategic industry

that will be abandoned as a result of the liberalised market policies." This criterion also includes whether the company will be sold off entirely, or if less than 50 per cent of its shares will be sold.

"The MCP decided to keep in the hands of the holding companies the majority of shares in the companies manufacturing aluminium, flour, pharmaceuticals and cigarettes," explained Khattab. "However, the majority stake in companies manufacturing chocolates, biscuits, milk, matches, insecticides, soap and dried agricultural products, however, will be sold off."

The second set of criteria is based on the profitability of the companies in fiscal year 1994/95. According to Khattab, the profit margin has been the main catalyst which prompted both investors and individuals alike to buy the majority of shares in companies traded on the stock market over the last few years.

The past success has injected a strong measure of optimism with regard to these sales. "This optimism," said Khattab, "is soundly founded because there has been a good deal of interest on the stock market to buy the shares of these eight companies traded on the stock market over the last few years."

The past success has injected a strong measure of optimism with regard to these sales. "This optimism," said Khattab, "is soundly founded because there has been a good deal of interest on the stock market to buy the shares of these eight companies traded on the stock market over the last few years."

Also fuelling his optimism is the successful sale of shares of three companies which were privatised this month: Kafr El-Zayat Pesticides and Chemicals Company (45 per cent of shares), Misr Oil

and Soap (53 per cent) and the Nile Match and Prefabricated Wood Houses Company (64.7 per cent). These three companies, which were privatised as part of El-Ganzouri's decision last February to sell roughly 72 public sector companies were successful, profit-making enterprises, and public interest in purchasing their shares was high, noted Khattab.

"This is why we decided to place these shares on the market over the last few days," he said. "There is enough money on the market to absorb about five companies each week."

The majority of officials and analysts note that this recent decision is a definite step in the right direction. But others are more critical, arguing that the privatisation programme has been moving too slowly.

Although there has been a lot of movement recently on the privatisation front, argued Dr Ahmed Abu Ismail, a former finance minister and a Wafdist member of parliament, the results are still not encouraging enough. "To a great extent," he said, "this is due to the fact that Egyptians still see this programme as an example of the government's conceding to IMF's orders. This idea, however, is wrong."

"But the government," he added, "has not done much to convince people that privatisation and liberalisation are the panacea to many of the com-

try's deeply-rooted economic problems."

The leftists, or the "old guard," as Abu Ismail prefers to refer to them, are largely responsible for slowing down the privatisation process. They have managed to rouse the concerns of workers in public sector companies against privatisation and have helped in filing cases in court in opposition to the sale of public sector assets, he said.

"El-Ganzouri's government, nonetheless,

has done very well with the recent spurt in privatisation, and the continued improvement in the performance of public sector companies (both sold and unsold) will help people to realise that privatisation improves the financial situation of these companies and attracts new investors," he noted.

Tawfiq Abdou Ismail, a member of the People's Assembly Planning and Budget Committee, stated that the sluggish pace of reform and privatisation is mainly due to a conflict between the government and foreign consulting firms over the valuation of assets.

"This problem is exacerbated when the company is found to have large areas of land in strategic urban locations, as was the case with the Broilers Company and El-Nasr Transformers Company (El-Macu)," said Ismail. "In these instances, the sale of the company can be delayed."

But, he added, the privatisation programme has been moving at a faster pace since the new phase was launched in February by El-Ganzouri. And, he said, statistics released by his committee reveal that the overall burden of the public sector's losses, for the first time in five years, is not growing. The number of loss-making public sector companies, out of the remaining 290 companies to be privatised, dropped from 119 to 90 in 1992. As a whole, public sector companies registered net profits of LE1.5 billion in 1995.

The programme can be accelerated, stated Ismail, by concentrating on selling companies to "groups of investors" who specialise in certain industries. "This means that these investors can do a great deal to improve the company's performance and raise productivity rates which, ultimately, is the main aim of privatisation," explained Ismail.

## How much?

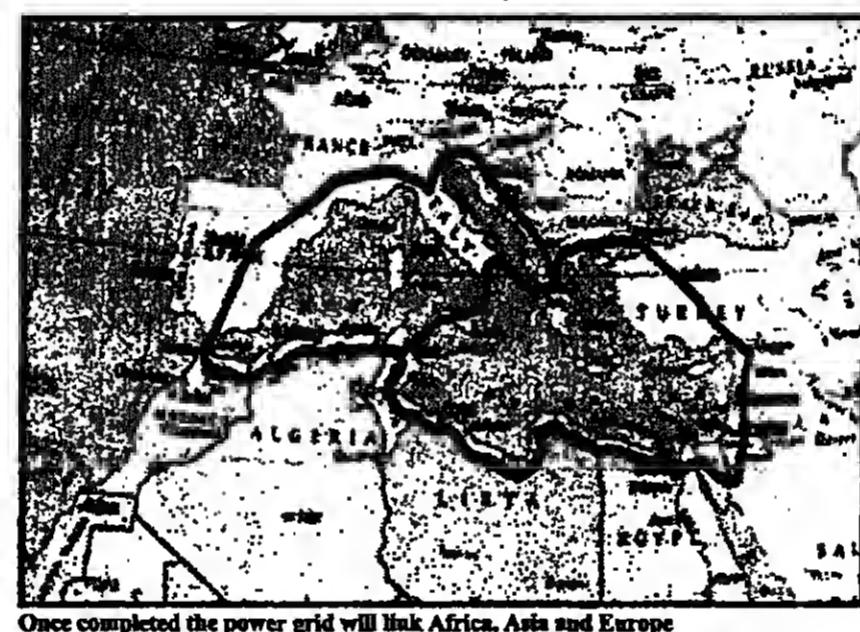
THE PRIVATISATION programme under Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri has witnessed a recent surge in activity since last February. On 14 February, El-Ganzouri decided to privatisate 72 companies. At the time, the revenue of public assets in Egypt totalled LE5.6 billion. These revenues were accrued from the total sale of three companies, Pepsi Cola (LE156.7 million), Coca-Cola (LE322 million) and El-Nasr Broilers and Pressure Vessels Company (LE56 million), as well as the di-

vestment of more than 90 per cent of the assets of nine land reclamation companies. Additionally, 20 to 40 per cent of the shares in 16 companies were put up for sale on the stock market.

These initiatives resulted in the reduction of the number of state-owned companies from 319 to 290. And, out of these 290 remaining companies, the 72 selected by El-Ganzouri to be privatised were to be sold off totally or partially. By June, the sales had netted LE5.8 billion.

## More power to the people

Five Middle Eastern countries are linking their electricity grids in an attempt to meet growing demand and cut costs. Zeinab Abul-Gheit and Eman Abdel-Moeti report.



Once completed the power grid will link Africa, Asia and Europe

As part and parcel of a three-tier mega-project linking Egypt's power grid to that of several neighbouring North African, European and Asian countries, the Egyptian Ministry of Electricity signed an agreement with Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Syria.

This agreement, dubbed the Five Countries Interconnection Project (FCIP), is the first of the three to be signed, and allows for the linking of Egypt's power grid to those of the other four signatories by the year 2002. Once completed, the extended power grid will link Egypt with Asia through Syria and Jordan, and to Europe through Turkey.

The second project is the Pan-Arab Interconnection Project between Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states. The third is the Mediterranean Sea Power Pool Project, which will join the nations of North Africa to those of southern Europe. This project involves extending the link from Egypt to Libya and the Maghreb countries on to Spain through Morocco, finally, to Turkey through Europe.

According to Engineer Maher Aziz, director of Environmental Studies Department in the Electricity and Energy Authority, joining power grids allows the various countries to rely on the others' power supply during local peak hours when demand often exceeds supply. Statistics from the Ministry of Electricity and Energy reveal that over the last decade, the demand for electricity in Egypt has increased tremendously. In 1981, peak demand for power was 3,230 megawatts per hour (mw/h), but in 1995, this demand had rocketed to 8,500mw/h. By the year 2015, this figure is expected to reach 20,000mw/h.

"Joining the grids," said Aziz, "will help in meeting this increasing de-

mand."

The benefits of electrical interconnection, however, are economic as well as technical. During the 3rd Afro-Asian International Conference in early 1996, Maher Abaza, Egypt's minister of electricity and energy, said that, economically, Egypt will be able to depend on the other countries connected to the grid during its peak-hour demand while being able to store its supply of electricity during the other countries' peak hours. As a result, the cost of energy will decrease as supply exceeds demand. In fact, say some experts, the five states who signed the first agreement earlier this month, could expect to save up to \$2 billion per year by utilising

Jordan and Turkey's excess power generating capabilities.

Ultimately, the project will be beneficial to all parties involved. Along

with reducing the price of the electricity, some of the signatory states will be entitled to collect duties as the power passes through their territories. Also,

the exchange of experts and information will promote technical cooperation in the field of electricity between the parties involved.

With the FCIP scheduled to begin opera-

tion in 1997, a 500 kilo volt (kv)

transmission line is being laid, crossing Sinai from Suez to Taba. This line will

be connected in Aqaba to the 400kv Jordanian system.

Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Europe.

This project, said Abaza last June

in Italy, will be begin in 1998.

But the Egyptian government, he said, has been exerting tremendous effort

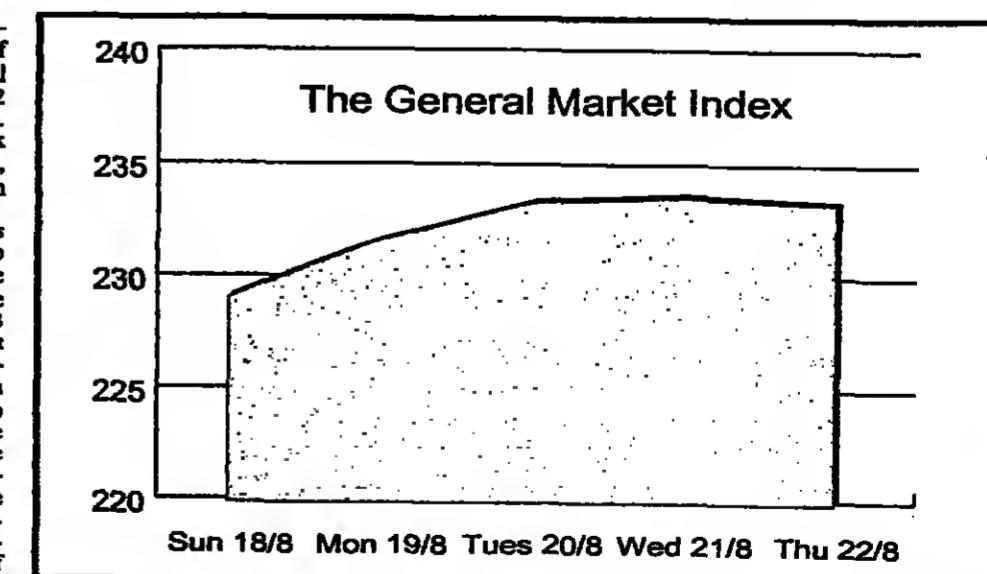
since the 1980's to renew and revamp the country's electrical infrastructure in order to guarantee the success of these projects. Efforts are also under way to develop alternate sources of energy such as hydro-electric and natural gas.

Egypt, said Abaza, signed an agreement with Zaire in 1987 to study the feasibility of linking the two countries' power grids in order to capitalise on the huge hydro-electric power source at Inga on the Zaire River. Approximately 50,000mw/h of electricity will be generated through this project, and much of this energy can be exported to Europe through Turkey and Spain. The project will be financed by the African Bank.

He added that the agreement will facilitate investment measures between these markets by recording all listed companies in the four markets. It will also simplify clearing measures.

## Market report

### Financial sector soars



Sun 18/8 Mon 19/8 Tues 20/8 Wed 21/8 Thu 22/8

240  
235  
230  
225  
220

The index, MIBank's shares closed at LE295. Floating 65 per cent of its shares, the Nile Matches and Prefabricated Houses Company was the market's shining star of the week. Trading in its shares increased in value by 68 per cent to close at LE49.

The index for the financial sector rose by 1.98 points to close at 298.46. This increase was partly a result of a surge in the share values of 23 companies. Topping the list was the Suez Sacks Company, which registered an LE26 per share increase to level off at LE250, while those of the Amerya Rhone Polaris for Pharmaceutical Industries gained LE20 to close at LE360. Shares of Kafr El-Zayat Pesticides and Chemicals caught the attention of investors after they increased in value by 68 per cent to close at LE49.

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Other companies, however, such as Cairo for Investment and Development (CID), had a rough week. CID's shares lost 53.33 per cent of their value and closed at LE14, while those of Al-Alam Beverages lost LE5 to level off at LE62.

Trading in bonds accounted for only 2.47 per cent of market transactions. In all, 35,373 bonds changed hands.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

**Lisez**

- Sommet économique du Caire
- Le coup de semonce de Moubarak
- Syrie-Jordanie
- Les eaux de la réconciliation
- Enquête sur les expatriés du Golfe
- La fin d'un âge d'or
- Excision
- Les dangers d'une loi controversée
- Universités privées
- Des promesses incertaines
- Festival d'Ismailiya
- La danse des peuples

Rédacteur en Chef Exécutif  
Mohamed Salmawy

مكتبة من الأصل

# The truth of things

**The death this week of Ahmed Bahaeeddin robs Egyptian journalism of one its most distinguished practitioners.**

**Al-Ahram Weekly remembers the man whose writings, over four decades, came to embody the conscience of the nation**



Photo: Mohamed E-Qalby

AHMED BAHAEEDDIN, the journalist whose career spanned some of the most turbulent periods of Egypt's modern history, died last Saturday of heart failure at a summer resort near Alexandria. He was 69, and for the past six years, following a debilitating stroke in 1990, had been unable to write.

During a long and distinguished career, Bahaeeddin edited many of Egypt's leading publications, including *Al-Ahram*, as well as heading the Press Syndicate and the Arab Journalists Federation. His knack for objective news analysis earned him respect throughout the Arab world.

Born in Alexandria in 1927, Bahaeeddin obtained a university degree in law at the age of 19. He worked for the government as a junior legal aide while contributing articles to a now-defunct magazine called *Fayrouz* (Seasons). In 1952 he joined the staff of the weekly magazine *Rose El-Yousuf* and, four years later, at the age of 29, was appointed editor-in-chief of the magazine *Sabah El-Kheir* (Good Morning), which was then being launched.

In 1959 he became editor-in-chief of *Al-Shaab* newspaper (now defunct, and no relation to the Labour Party's newspaper), and several months later moved to *Al-Akhbar* as one of the newspaper's chief editors. In 1962 he was named editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Al-*

*her So'a*. He was unanimously elected to head the Egyptian Press Syndicate in 1967 and, in 1972, to chair the Arab Journalists Federation.

He also contributed articles to *Al-Ahram*, and became its editor-in-chief in 1974, a post he resigned in 1976, largely owing to political differences with the late President Anwar Sadat. He subsequently went to Kuwait, where he edited the magazine *Al-Arabi*. He returned to Cairo in 1980 and for the next decade was a regular contributor to *Al-Ahram*, the author of a daily column entitled 'Diary'. These contributions stopped in 1990 following his stroke.

An unceasing champion of the cause of reason, Bahaeeddin was the author of several books, including *Days That Made History*, *Fayrouz Rex*, *The Myth Was Destroyed at Noon and Political Legality in the Arab World*. Believing too, that the Arabs would be better served by knowing their enemy, Bahaeeddin published a book entitled *Israeli Af-*

comparison between Muslims and a patient devoting great care to a minor finger wound while neglecting a much more serious heart problem. He also warned, nearly 40 years ago, that branding others as infidels was a "fascist weapon" that could inflict great harm on the cause of enlightenment.

Bahaeeddin came under fire as a result of his writing but never failed. Neither was his respect for others' right to oppose his views shaken.

Although he supported the 1952 Revolution he was not oblivious to shortcomings. And although he was a personal friend of Sadat, even before he became president, he was a staunch opponent of his policies. A champion of Arab unity, Bahaeeddin was the first journalist to call for the establishment of a Palestinian state following the Arab defeat of 1967.

According to columnist Salama Ahmed Salama, Bahaeeddin had five preoccupations in his writings: the homeland, social justice, reason, knowledge and the rights of the citizen. But a lifelong supporter of arts, Bahaeeddin also made occasional forays into the fields of literary and theatre criticism.

Married to a Christian, he was the father of a son and a daughter.

## Heart of the matter



Illustration: Abd-Shan Abd-Shan

Bahaeeddin was incapable of turning away anyone who sought out his testimony on events or his opinions as to their development. He had a pronounced sense of the responsibility of the writer, and could never refuse anyone who asked for his time. Tragically, though, at the very moment in Arab history when a man of his qualities, a man committed to reason and capable of its simplest, most cogent expression, was needed more than ever before he fell prey to an illness that left him bedridden, isolated from events and people, from pen and paper, from public lectures and seminars.

I confess that throughout the Gulf crisis and war there was no voice I missed as much as the voice of Ahmed Bahaeeddin. Amid the tidal wave of ink spilled over the bloody events, it was the words of Ahmed Bahaeeddin that one missed. He alone was absent, though he, among the legion of commentators, was always the closest to the truth of things, the most capable of uncovering the heart of the matter.

His inexorable retreat into silence did not just deprive us of his balanced, considered judgment. The waste was more, for we were deprived, too, of the experience he had gleaned from five years spent in Kuwait, years in which he worked and wrote, observing the entire Gulf, studying it, and as was his wont, coming to a profound understanding.

**Mohamed Hassanein Heikal**

*Excerpt from Mohamed Hassanein Heikal's introduction to Ahmed Bahaeeddin's *Yawmiya Hadha Al-Zaman (Diaries of the Times)*, published by Al-Ahram*

## The last page

Bahaeeddin was a member of a rare breed — an Arab intellectual over whom there exists a majority consensus. For with Bahaeeddin there was always room for agreement, whether on principles, personal characteristics or scholarship. Perhaps it is precisely this quality that allowed him to give something significant to every post he took, to every publication on which he worked.

As editor of *El-Gedid*, a youth magazine, he consistently lent a young and vibrant tone. Moving to a daily newspaper he produced excellent daily coverage. When he was at the helm of a monthly cultural magazine, his policy was to encourage an expansive yet deeply rewarding variety. His contribution to his profession was prolific, and condonably renewed.

Bahaeeddin's talents were legion. He loved the actual business of producing newspapers and magazines, of designing and laying out the pages of a newspaper or the cover of a magazine. And such was his judgement, his ability to visualise how things would look and his understanding of how they worked, that he was truly a one-man production team.

Bahaeeddin was one of the first Arab intellectuals to consolidate his relationships across the Arab world. He maintained close contacts with Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese and Gulf intellectuals. Indeed, in his character the feeling of Arab belonging was paramount. It seems sadly appropriate then, that the causes in his health should have mirrored the crises of the Arab nation. In 1967 he was diagnosed as suffering from diabetes. Following the Suez and Shatila massacres he developed blood pressure. It was almost as if each event left its mark on his body. And now he has passed away, just at the time when the pan-Arab dream, of which he was a most eloquent proponent and representative, is itself fading from memory.

**Fahmy Howeldy**  
*Columnist at Al-Ahram*

Ahmed Bahaeeddin was one of the younger members of a generation of outstanding journalists that included Mohamed Hassan Heikal, Mustafa and Ali Amara and Amina El-Said among others. For three decades, between the '50s to the late '80s, he also acted as the mentor and model for generations of aspiring journalists.

It was Bahaeeddin who taught me the importance of both an incessantly questioning approach and the ability to forecast future turns in events.

The last issue he tackled was the emigration of Russian Jews to Israel, which he dubbed "the crime of the century". Today Soviet Jews occupy seven seats in the Knesset, and they continue to flow into Israel. In the coming days many will write about his uncanny prescience; his remarkable foresight about the events that have led to the situation we witness today.

His writings would often occasion worried frowns on the brows of statesmen and men of religion alike. He wrote always under the threat that his writing would one day be banned — this despite the fact that he was the shiest, most modest of men.

Though most of his writing was politically oriented — starting with *Al-Nugat Al-Rabi'a* (The Fourth Stage) — which attacked the American manoeuvres — and *Fayrouz Al-Malik*, he was also a connoisseur of literature and the arts, areas he tackled in several articles, repeated as part of his final book *Yawmiya Hadha Al-Zaman* (Diaries of the Times).

Bahaeeddin epitomises a generation of extremely gifted intellectuals who were never tempted by the easy option. It is a generation of which few remain.

**Abdel-Ghani Abul-Enein**  
*Artist and layout editor*

## An empty space

It was in the hope that someday Ahmed Bahaeeddin would be able once more to take up his pen that we at *Al-Ahram* decided to keep free the space on the back-page where his daily column had for so long been published. Who among us would have had the courage, the audacity to take the place of Ahmed Bahaeeddin...? No other writer could have hoped to fill his shoes. Yet even as we were beseeching God that he would regain consciousness, he boarded that craft on which he will navigate the river from which there can be no return.

Ahmed Bahaeeddin never liked flattery and always shied away from praise... Moreover, he was deeply concerned about the future of Egyptian journalism and journalists... But I shall not speak here about Ahmed Bahaeeddin's work as a journalist. To do him justice would require an entire book. Suffice to say that when, at the age of 29, he was appointed editor-in-chief of *Sabah El-Kheir* he was the youngest person to hold such a post in the history of Egypt's journalism. And when he was appointed editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* 22 years ago, he had reached the apex of his career.

**Ibrahim Nafie**

*Excerpt from Ibrahim Nafie's front-page obituary, Al-Ahram, 26 August*

## Passing of an era

Bahaeeddin, whose journalistic career began in the second half of the 20th century, lived and worked during the most tumultuous period of Egypt's modern history. He lived through the July Revolution, the exile of the king, the crisis of 1954 and the demonstrations, the tripartite aggression of 1956.

Such momentous events demanded men capable of meeting the challenges they posed. And there were, too, other movements of equal importance, both domestically and internationally — there was Arab unity, and the struggle, facing all of the Third World, to develop and modernise.

These formed the backdrop, the context within which Bahaeeddin worked. Certainly it is no coincidence that he was part of a group of immensely talented intellectuals, including Yousef Idris, Salah Abdel-Sabour, Salah Jahan, Hessa Fouad and Gamal Kamel, all of whom learned the fundamentals of their trade in *Rose El-Yousuf*.

In paying our last respects to Bahaeeddin it is, I feel, no overstatement to say that we are paying our respects not to an individual but to the age he represented. It is an era, itself, that has passed away with Bahaeeddin.

Professionally I was always drawn to Bahaeeddin's tone, to his voice, his rigour, his erudition and his knowledge. He was acquainted with literature, poetry and the plastic arts, as well as with the pressing social issues of his day. Erudite and meticulous, fully engaged with his society — these are the qualities that marked Bahaeeddin, these the reasons why I, and many of my contemporaries, feel that his passing away is no less than a calamity.

**Mustafa Nabil**

*Editor-in-chief of Al-Hilal cultural monthly*

## Eyes on the future

Perhaps because he had such a dear place in my heart I have always imagined that I had the same place in his. I know that this is unlikely, but it is an illusion I enjoy.

With Bahaeeddin I shared secrets I will share with no one else. And it was with Bahaeeddin that I have had the most stimulating conversations to which I, at least, have ever been party. He was a man of the most extraordinary intelligence and perception. By his side I invariably felt dull and somehow diminished — an admission that, even now, it is difficult to make. In light-hearted moments he would sometimes laugh until his eyes brimmed with tears. He would mock others and at the same time would laugh at himself.

Beneath his tough exterior Bahaeeddin was, I think, a very emotional man. In three decades a never saw him shed a tear, but I well remember his sadness when Sadat banned him from working in journalism. Almost every morning I would meet with Bahaeeddin and others, who like ourselves had been banned from writing, and we would stroll along the Nile by the Sheraton. On one such stroll I remember I asked him why he appeared so depressed and he replied that, ever since he had graduated, he had devoted himself to his work, arriving at his office promptly every morning, leaving only when the day was done. Now, he said, he had been forced to break the habit of a lifetime.

He was an immensely rational man and in many ways appears now to have been ahead of his time. His thoughts had turned to the shape of the coming century some 25 years ago. He was merciless in his castigation of backward-looking rulers and regimes and always wanted others to share his optimism in the possibility of a brighter, better future.

**Saad Kamel**

*Writer*

satisfiable curiosity, a desire to know and understand everything to be known, about the age and its components, whether political, economic, philosophic or social.

This desire to understand, this breadth of vision, was perhaps underwritten by his love of the arts. He was driven to explore the full scope and meaning of beauty in all its manifestations, and spared no appreciation for them all.

A rare equation: rejecting rigidity and narrow-mindedness Ahmed Bahaeeddin strove always after openness in thought and independence of intellect.

Bahaeeddin's passing has left a gap in all our lives, a sense of loss made more difficult by the fact that the master had been forced into silence for six years before his final passing.

It is a sense of loss I have felt in a very concrete way. Since the launching of *Al-Ahram Weekly* more than five years ago I have often found myself on the verge of heading to Bahaeeddin's office upstairs, expecting to be met with the usual broad smile, to find him, as always, ready to help, offering advice and guidance as calmly and modestly as he always did.

"What does the master have to say about our new experiment?"

It is a question that has often crossed my mind during the past five, challenging years.

The master began his long journey in silence, and could never make our meetings. But his call to reason remains with us always. It is the gift that he offered us, and the gift that remains.

**Hosny Guindly**



photo: Mohamed E-Qalby

## An unassuming master

He came, made humanity richer, then left. No man can do better or more. And yet Ahmed Bahaeeddin did so calmly. Neither his voice nor his pen was ever raised.

He gave, he enriched, and silently he left.

Bahaeeddin's gift to his readers was to inspire them to think and question, to dare them to hope. And here too, no man could do better.

His thought embraced a panoply of Egyptian concerns; he concerned himself with everything, from the Arab-Israeli conflict to the daily toll and turmoil of the average Egyptian's life. He began to write when ornamentation and rhetoric seemed to reign supreme but had the courage to turn his back on both.

His style and method were uniquely his own. A dedicated rationalist, he approached all issues — whether political or social, domestic or regional, national — with the same rigour, striving to uncover the essence of a phenomenon and define its fundamental features.

His interests were catholic, as were the areas he studied, the subjects upon which he commented. Not was he ever tempted to allow the clamour of urgent issues to drown out more subtle concerns. He was consistent in his emphasis on the necessity for a far-sighted approach to urban planning and his writing promoted a deeper understanding and appreciation of architecture, indeed all art. And long before the environment was a fashionable subject he was an eloquent advocate of conservation.

In brief, Bahaeeddin was a unique creation, the sum of a deep sense of the "East" and a mature assimilation of the "West". This unique mix was compounded by an in-

A permanent book market

I believe the idea of a permanent year-round book market was first mooted when the Cairo book fair was inaugurated, in response to the tremendous interest, shown by a broad cross section of the general public, that the event has elicited. Despite the steep rise in the price of books establishing a permanent book market of a reasonable size, and in whatever location, would be of great service to both publishers, searching for outlets, and for a reading public starved of texts.

**Grown-ups are the problem**  
Children's Day has passed leaving the same, nagging questions just what constitutes the most important problem children face? The answer, in my opinion, is quite simple. Grown-ups are the problem.

A newborn child is like a blank slate on which anything can be written. And those who write on this blank slate are grown-ups... Those who fill the lines on this clean white sheet are the family, the school, the newspapers, radio, television, public opinion and prejudices witnessed in the street, at home, in the playground... To say that the upbringing of today's children represents our most important investment in the future is not mere rhetoric.

On my first visit to Japan 20 years ago I brought back a 'toy' aeroplane for a child of seven. To put this toy together in Cairo needed the help of more than one engineer friend. Think of that toy, and of the manufacturing giant that Japan has become, and you see the truth of my argument.

**History is not a matter of muck-raking**  
No nation in the world can afford to ignore its own history. Yet there is a difference, and an important one, between the objective analysis of our history and the seemingly insatiable taste for salacious detail and muck-raking. The latter, unfortunately, has been with us for some time now. When it first reared its head we worried about the dangers, and the warnings went unheeded. So let me repeat: anyone who writes history according to his own whims, and in his own image, while imagining he will be the best to do so, is merely following, and propagating, a well-established precedent.

**The dead and the living**  
I do not know what Shimon Peres discussed during his visit to Cairo. I would, however, like to comment on a news item, published on the day of his arrival, an item about whose consequences and developments I am completely in the dark.

The news item concerned the plan to transfer a Jewish cemetery, presently in the path of the planned Cairo ring road, from its current location to another. This removal is apparently one of the issues Mr Peres wants to discuss.

In Egypt, as in other countries, there are cemeteries for Muslims, Christians, Jews, and for other creeds, none of which escape the exigencies of modern life, and its corollary, urban expansion. But when cemeteries have to be relocated, in Egypt, as in other countries, this is done in accordance with strict rules and regulations.

What I find bizarre, though, is not the insistence that Jewish cemeteries be exempted from such relocation, but that the demand is being made at precisely that moment when Israel's prime minister is himself talking about the relocation — transferring them from the West Bank — of tens of thousands of living people.

The question here, of course, is not the relocation of graves but the uprooting of an entire life — its cities, villages and farms, its date palms and olive trees, its schools and playgrounds. The Israeli view appears to be that such uprooting is legitimate, while the transfer of a small number of graves is not.

(25 July, 1990)  
*Excerpts from Bahaeeddin's regular Al-Ahram column, Diary*

# Clipping Hizbullah's wings

In a neat, tree-lined car park in downtown West Beirut, a crowd gathers to listen to Mohamed Berjawi, Hizbullah's candidate for one of the two seats assigned to the Shi'ite community for the Beirut segment of Lebanon's parliamentary elections. "The only reason the people of Beirut can hold their heads high is because of Hizbullah's resistance in South Lebanon," says Berjawi to prolonged applause.

Yet the crowd is small, with only 100 in attendance. They are also apprehensive. The previous week — in the first round of Lebanon's elections for the Mount Lebanon district — Hizbullah failed to keep its seat in Baabda, part of the Mount Lebanon electoral district which includes Beirut's Shi'ite southern suburbs, viewed as a Hizbullah stronghold. Last Sunday, two candidates from the radical Sunni Islamic Association (IA) — who formed a bloc of 12 Islamist MPs with Hizbullah in the outgoing parliament — lost their seats in the North Lebanon elections. In Mount Lebanon, Hizbullah lost out to candidates aligned with Nabih Berri's Shi'ite (and pro-Syrian) Amal Movement; in the north, the IA lost to supporters of Lebanon's Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

For political commentators like deputy editor of the *As-Safir* newspaper, Mohamed Mashmoushi, such shifts in political fortune signal the demise of religious extremism and a "return to Lebanon's more moderate traditions." But Hizbullah detects a more sinister hand at work.

"There is a US-led conspiracy against Hizbullah," says Hizbullah parliamentary aide, Hassan Ismail. "And the Lebanese government is trying to marginalise us."

Born in the aftermath of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Hizbullah has since acquired repute as Lebanon's sole remaining (and most effective) political militia, especially through its resistance to Israel's 18-year occupation in South Lebanon. Yet, until the late 1980s, Hizbullah was viewed by most Lebanese as an Iranian import, with its call for an "Islamic Lebanon" utterly at odds with Lebanon's multi-confessional character.

In 1989 — under the prodding of the movement's spiritual guide, Hussein Fadl-

lallah — Hizbullah made a strategic turn to enter mainstream Lebanese politics, in anticipation of Lebanon's first post-civil war elections held in 1992.

The new line proved successful. In the 1992 poll, Hizbullah retained eight deputies to Lebanon's then 108 (now 128) member parliament, including six from the mainly Shi'ite Bekaa Valley. These gains, says Mashmoushi, had less to do with Hizbullah's military resistance than with its "ability to provide social services for the masses" in the absence of any governmental provision. It is a model of social activism. Since the 1992 elections, Hizbullah has extended its services to South Lebanon, hoping for similar political rewards.

After Israel's "Grapes of Wrath" onslaught on Lebanon last April, Hizbullah spokespersons estimate that it has repaired 5,000 Lebanese homes, rebuilt roads and other infrastructure and paid compensation to 2,300 farmers, mainly in South Lebanon. Neutral observers agree such figures are probably accurate. "Hizbullah in Lebanon is seen primarily as a social movement, as the defender of the poor," says Lebanese social scientist, Paul Salim.

Such public provision compares favourably with the relative lack of government services and those provided by Lebanon's Council of the South, headed by Amal, historically the strongest Shi'ite party in the south. The political result, says Salim, is that were there a straight contest for the Shi'ite vote in South Lebanon, "Hizbullah would probably win around 50 per cent of the mandates."

But there is no going to be a straight contest. First, Lebanon's complex electoral system compels candidates representing one confession to form blocs with parties representing other confessions, so for Hizbullah to win any of the 13 Shi'ite seats in the south will require a pact with Christian candidates who have five seats.

But the main reason is that — unlike the 1992 elections — this time Amal is not interested in any coalition with Hizbullah, for fear of Amal losing its political hegemony in the south. "It is a

struggle for the leadership of the Shi'ite community," says Mashmoushi.

Attempts to form a united list between Hizbullah and Amal broke down over the issue of representation in the south. "We are not against a coalition with Amal," says Hassan Ismail, "but we insist on having equal shares. Hizbullah is the dominant Shi'ite force in the south by common consent. Yet, out of the 13 Shi'ite seats, Amal was willing to grant us only two or three." For its part, Amal accuses Hizbullah of wanting not just equal shares, but a veto over all candidates on any agreed list, including those representing the Christian and Sunni communities.

The result is stalemate, less than 10 days before the poll for South Lebanon. Syria — which backs Amal but is wary of Hizbullah's increasing prowess in South Lebanon — is currently engaged in frantic mediation efforts between Hizbullah and Amal to get them to agree on a joint list for South Lebanon. Should these efforts fail, Hizbullah may form a list with a medley of leftist and Nasserite parties against Amal and its pro-government allies. This will not only raise the heat (as well as the prospect of violence) between Hizbullah and Amal during next week's electoral run-in in South Lebanon. It will be read — regionally as much as domestically — as an act of defiance by Hizbullah against Syria, a gesture that is unlikely to be received well in Damascus.

But what impact such tensions will have on Hizbullah's longer term strategy for Lebanon is less clear. "When Hizbullah stood for the elections in 1992, many people said this augured an easing of the military resistance against Israel in the south," says Mashmoushi, "but the resistance increased. Whether Hizbullah gets a larger or smaller share of seats in the next parliament is unlikely to affect its military strategy."

Hizbullah, too, appears resigned to the prospect that it may be squeezed in these elections, that, as the Lebanese say, its wings may be clipped. "It is not necessary to have parliamentary seats to be strong in Lebanon," says Hassan Ismail. "It is more important to have a base among the people."



Palestinian boys play on the ruins of a community centre in Jerusalem's old city. This week Israeli authorities bulldozed the centre. PLO leader Yasser Arafat called for a general strike in protest against Israeli move to expand settlements (photo: AFP)

## Clan reigns in Lebanon poll

Lebanon held the second round of five-phase national elections on Sunday in the North Lebanon Governorate. While many of the candidates who won had been expected to do so, there were quite a few surprises.

The elections in the north were very different from that in Mount Lebanon where the battle was clearly between opponents and supporters of the government.

The results in the north showed the failure of the Christian Phalange Party, the Communist Party and the Syrian Nationalist Party as well as Islamic groups to win large numbers of votes.

A major surprise was that relatively new-comers on the political scene were able to acquire more votes. Newcomer Musab Al-Abdab's victory in the district of Tripoli had more votes than former prime minister and opposition candidate Omar Karamé who headed an election ticket and Transportation Minister Ossama Miskawi.

Another surprise was the victory of Boutros Harb, a Maronite opposition figure and former education minister. He had boycotted the last general elections.

But in general, many of the prominent candidates and incumbent deputies were re-elected. The four ministers who were also running won seats.

Analysts had described the North Lebanon ballot as confusing because none of the five election tickets could be dubbed as anti- or pro-government. Each coalition ticket had supporters from both sides. And those in the opposition are not against the government's pro-Syria line, unlike in Mount Lebanon. Given that there was no clear distinction between election tickets, voters tended to vote according to individual candidates and not complete slates. Karame's National Solidarity list, for example, was nominally an opposition ticket but it had a few government supporters on it.

There was also the tendency to vote according to family and clan allegiance in the north. There are a few families who are politically influential in certain areas like the Franjeh and Karame families. But some believe this tradition is slowly becoming unpopular. In North Lebanon, many cast their ballots according to their loyalty to

families who have political clout. It is true families and political chieftains have and will always play a role in Lebanese politics. But with time this will change and people will be more interested in political programmes. But then again these families offer voters services and this gains their loyalty," said Habib Kayrouz, an unsuccessful Maronite candidate.

Voter turnout among the 578,000 eligible

voters in the north was relatively high. It was approximately 50 per cent compared to 30 per cent in the 1992 poll.

More than 130 candidates were vying for 28 seats allotted to the North Lebanon Governorate in the 128-member half-Christian half-Muslim parliament. The seats are allocated to nine Maronites, 11 Sunnis, two Alawites and six Greek Orthodox.

Security was tight and only minor infringements were reported. Some candidates complained of voting irregularities but independent observers said there were no wide scale electoral abuses unlike what was seen in Mount Lebanon. This view is shared by Issam Fares, a Greek Orthodox candidate who won a seat in parliament. He

in the absence of a clear opposition, family loyalties rather than political affiliations determined the outcome of the North Lebanon elections, reports Zeina Khodr

said: "The elections in the north were conducted in a high-class and sportsmanlike atmosphere. No candidates attacked each other as was the case in the Mount Lebanon poll where candidates traded insults. There were complaints of abuses but none were really significant."

According to George Deeb, professor of international law at the Lebanese University, the general elections in Lebanon are taking the shape of a race between moderates and extremists as declared by Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri. "This is clearly shown by the failure of Hizbullah to keep its seat in the Mount Lebanon elections.

The Christians in the electoral district did not give their votes to Hizbullah's candidate Ali Ammar. Also, Ammar lost the vote of the Druze community after its leader Walid Jumblatt supported the other election ticket. But the polls in South Lebanon and the Bekaa will be different. There, the Christian vote is not significant and the group will be able to keep its seats."

Deeb added that the Christian and Muslim extremists in the north did not have enough political weight to tip the balance.

Elections in the remaining three govern-

ments — Beirut, South Lebanon and the Bekaa — will take place over the next three weeks. Sixty-three seats have already been determined. And there is already a clear trend that the new legislature will be overwhelmingly pro-government.

Meanwhile, the Jordanian army with-

drew its heavy presence from Karak, where the riots first started, and lifted the curfew imposed on the city's residents. Authorities also began releasing thousands of detainees. Alleged pro-Iraqi activists, however, are expected to stand trial soon.

**Amman expels Iraqis**  
FOLLOWING last week's bread riots in southern Jordan, three Iraqi embassy staff members — the press attaché and the first secretary, and an administrator — were expelled from the country.

Jordan's Information Minister Marwan Muasher said that the Jordanian government had evidence implicating Iraq and the Jordanian Arab Socialist Baath Party (JASBP) in the riots that began over a three-fold hike in bread prices. Jordanian officials also hinted that the government might dissolve the JASBP for violating Jordanian laws.

However, the JASBP, a pro-Iraqi organisation with one deputy in the 80-seat lower house of parliament, denied involvement in the unrest.

Government attempts to link the rioting to outside instigators have been treated with skepticism by many politicians and Jordanian citizens, who also blame the protest on mounting economic problems and rising levels of poverty and unemployment.

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**Hijackers flee home**  
THE BRITISH government said yesterday that the seven Iraqis who hijacked a Sudanese airliner, re-routing it to London on Monday, will be questioned to determine whether to prosecute them, grant them political asylum or deport them.

As negotiations go on, the hijackers called for a return to Iraq as a reward for a victory; for the Americans, the plane was thus used to bring the Americans home after being summoned back to the United States.

The hijackers commanded the Sudanese plane as it left Khartoum, heading to Amman. The plane, which carried 186 passengers, landed in Cyprus's Larnaca Airport for refuelling, before continuing to London. After seven hours of negotiations, the hijackers surrendered at Stansted Airport in England.

According to an AP report, Iraqi opposition groups said the hijackers were staff members of the Iraqi Embassy in Khartoum who were afraid to return home after being summoned back to Baghdad. British police are also investigating the possible involvement of six female relatives of the hijackers, who were travelling with them on the flight.

## Al-Aqsa Mosque under threat

Statements issued last week by several Arab and Islamic countries warned Israel against continuing threats to Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, particularly Al-Aqsa Mosque, reports Lebna Gemma. Arab and Islamic fears about the status of the sites have increased sharply since the election of right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in late May. Shortly after his narrow victory, Israel's Supreme Military Court issued a ruling allowing an ultra-orthodox Jewish group to pray in Al-Aqsa Mosque, causing a furor among Muslims everywhere.

Palestinian officials expressed their concern that Al-Aqsa might suffer the same fate as Al-Ibrahim

Mosque in Hebron, where Muslims and Jews must divide their praying days.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat described the court's decision as "an affront to Muslims." He referred to the agreement between Palestinians and former Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, following the occupation of the holy city in 1967, allowing Jews to visit Al-Aqsa Mosque only as tourists.

Arafat called for an immediate meeting of the Arab and Muslim members of the "Jerusalem Committee" headed by King Hassan II of Morocco, to discuss Israel's violations and the deteriorating situation in Jerusalem.

Other top Palestinian officials warned that Israel's continued vi-

olations of Muslim rights to Al-Aqsa Mosque would destroy the peace process.

Faisal Al-Husseini, PLO executive responsible for the Jerusalem file, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview that Palestinians will not allow what happened in Hebron to be repeated at Al-Aqsa Mosque "otherwise there will be massacres... the only way for Israel to take over Al-Aqsa is over our dead bodies," he continued. Husseini said that Palestinians have a plan for protecting the mosque from Jewish violations.

The first part of the plan involves being continually present in the mosque, not giving Jewish extremists the chance to enter. The second part requires confronting

Jewish violations from the beginning."

In a recent interview, Palestinian negotiator Mahmoud Abbas, known as Abu Mazen, said "I hope the Israeli government will be rational regarding the court order and prevent its implementation, because its consequences could be disastrous."

Meanwhile, the Muslim World League issued a statement in Mecca, asking all Muslims "to work on annihilating the latest Israeli court decision, through all available channels, and prevent it from controlling Al-Aqsa Mosque."

Since Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, there have been numerous attempts by extremist Jewish groups to destroy Al-Aqsa.

In 1969, a man described by Israeli authorities as a "lunatic" tried to burn the mosque on the day of the march, which ended in a massacre when the Israeli army fired on the worshippers, killing 15 people and wounding hundreds.

The last 15 years, another ex-

tremist group began digging beneath Al-Aqsa Mosque to prove their claim that the second Jewish temple is situated in the same place.

Although these attempts failed, Palestinians have warned that the digging operations threatened the mosque's foundations.

In October 1990, the Guardians of the Temple Mount issued a statement announcing their intention to march towards Al-Aqsa in celebration of a Jewish festival and called for "the liberation of the Temple Mount (Al-Aqsa Mosque's site)"

from the hands of Arabs."

Palestinian Muslims rushed to de-

fine the mosque on the day of the

march, which ended in a massacre when the Israeli army fired on the worshippers, killing 15 people and wounding hundreds.

Most recently, ultra-orthodox Jew-

ish groups, particularly the Guardi-

ans, have been provoking Muslims

by distributing pictures of Jerusalem

in which Al-Aqsa is replaced by a

mosque's foundations.

Israel's efforts to control Al-Aqsa

mosque and other Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem are part of a wider

plan to completely end Palesti-

nian presence in the area. Other

attempts have included increasing

Jewish settlements in the city and

cancelling Palestinian identity

cards.

Iran accused Germany of "poisoning friendly relations" following Iran's former president's testimony in Berlin which blamed Tehran for the killing of exiled opponents, reports Khaled Dawoud

that has to have significance in terms of the way in which we shape our relations with Iran," he said.

On its part, the Iranian government reacted angrily to Beni Sadr's testimony in Berlin and the protection he received from the German authorities. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said, "Beni Sadr's lack of credibility is known to all". He called Beni Sadr's testimony "baseless" and added: "He lost his credit even among his own clique of anti-revolutionaries and nobody listens to him."

A Tehran English daily, *Iran News*, sharply criticised the German judicial system, stating: "Couldn't the German judicial system find a less passionately biased star witness against the leaders of the Islamic Republic? Perhaps the intention was to make a laughing stock out of the German judicial system."

The paper added: "He [Beni Sadr] has recently been financially troubled, so he surely could use some denials marks in exchange for his services as a witness, plus a fistful of dollars from CIA agents for

helping them accuse Iran of international terrorism."

Beni Sadr has skilfully used his high-profile visit to Germany to air numerous accusations against the Iranian regime and to call upon European countries

to sever their trade ties with Tehran. He told

news agency Reuters that at least 60 dissidents had been killed on the orders of the Iranian government in the last 16 years, and warned there would be more bloodshed.

"There will be more assassinations if Western

countries do not act with resolve and with greater transparency against the regime," he said. "Don't give the mullahs any new credit," he added. Beni Sadr has even gone as far as accusing German intelligence of establishing strong ties with the Iranian secret service.

The case of the murdered four Kurdish politicians in Berlin has created tension in relations between

Iran and Germany since it was revealed in March this year. The German Federal Prosecutor Bruno Jost has named the Iranian secret service, Vevak, as

# Stalled peace, cold war

**Despite the sabre rattling, the talk of missiles and anti-missile missiles, everyone, including Israel, has a lot to lose by a new Middle East war. The stalled peace process is unlikely to deteriorate into a hot war, writes Galal Nassar**

Even before Benjamin Netanyahu became Israel's prime minister in June, the shadow of war hovered over the region. As negotiations between Israel and Syria bogged down, the US and Egypt sought ways to extricate them from their impasse.

US coordinator of the peace process, Dennis Ross, flew to the region at the end of last month in the hope of finding an opening through which he could resume his stalled diplomacy in the region. He returned home when he discovered that he would have to begin again at point zero. Ross's plan was to test out Netanyahu's "Lebanon first" option, only to meet with Hafez Al-Assad's counter-demand for the "Golan first."

Assad reiterated this demand in an international press conference at Ras El-Tin Palace in Alexandria this month when he said that his position was founded upon the insistence of the Lebanese government and people that the Syrian and Lebanese tracks in the peace process are inseparable. Earlier in the month, Assad declared before a military parade marking the 51st anniversary of the foundation of the Syrian army that occupied Arab territories would be liberated.

Pressures mounted on Syria from all sides to accept the Israeli solution that would simultaneously reduce its regional influence by disassociating the Lebanese and Syrian tracks and restrain the Hezbollah-led Lebanese resistance which is backed by Syria and Iran. The strongest pressure Syria faces is the Turkish-Israeli security agreement. In return for concluding this defence agreement that directly targets Syria's strategic interests, Israel reportedly would bombard the training bases of the anti-Turkey Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) in Lebanon, sparing Turkish-Arab relations further acrimony. At the same time, Damascus, Aleppo and Latakia suffered a series of explosions, one of which was meant to assassinate PKK leader Abdullah Oglan, and for which Turkey declined responsibility. These events came fast in the wake of Israel's "Grapes of Wrath" operation in Lebanon, intended to provoke the Syrian forces stationed there and to demonstrate the futility of Syria's military presence in safeguarding Lebanon's security.

The intensity of these pressures must be seen against the background of the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement and the heady pace of normalisation between the two countries, all of which is intended to make Syria feel the noose tightening.

As pressures mount on Syria, Netanyahu grows increasingly intransigent. He refused to withdraw from the Golan and proposed partial solutions for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from South Lebanon in return for Syria ending its support for Hezbollah.

As negotiations ground to a halt, the Clinton administration called for intensifying pressure on Syria as retribution for rejecting Israeli conditions, scoring a victory for Clinton's foreign policy ahead of the American presidential elections.

Syria was thus subjected to renewed economic sanctions recently on the grounds that it supports Hezbollah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the PKK, all of which are ranked as terrorist organisations by the US administration. Washington applied the same logic in reviewing sanctions against Iran and Libya, in the hopes that this would boost Clinton's prospects for a second term of office.

Over the past few weeks, Syria and Israel have become increasingly entrenched in their positions. Following a tour of several Arab countries, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Sharaa restated Syria's position. He announced that Syria would only resume negotiations with Israel if Tel Aviv declared its commitment to the principle of "land-for-peace" and to the resolutions of the Madrid conference which are founded upon UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 calling upon Israel to withdraw from the Arab territories it occupied since 1967. He said, "Israel is dragging its feet in the peace process and undermining its foundations, which suggests that Netanyahu does not want peace." Meanwhile, in an interview on Israeli radio, Netanyahu said that his government would not be constrained by any oral pledge the former Labour government committed itself to.

This diplomatic posturing has been mirrored by statements by the two countries' respective military officials. Syrian Chief of Staff General Hikmet Al-Shabani announced that the military option is on the table among other options open to Damascus in its pursuit of a just peace. Syria has had to resort to the option of armed confrontation in the past in order to combat Israeli aggression on Arab territory. He stressed that Syria will not let Israel obtain through a negotiated settlement what it was unable to obtain through war and territorial aggression. At the same time, Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, in explicitly menacing tones, said that Israel would strike all forces that are stationed in South Lebanon in response to any attacks against northern Israel and Israeli forces deployed in the so-called security zone.

The verbal sabre rattling increased in intensity



Assad



Netanyahu



A military helicopter flies over Israeli tanks during army manoeuvres in the Golan Heights in June. Netanyahu was recently compared to Adolf Hitler in a Syrian newspaper (photo: AP)

when Netanyahu's threats against Lebanon virtually convinced Syria that war between Israel and Syria was imminent. Damascus warned Tel Aviv that Israel would suffer a massive defeat in the event of a military confrontation with the Arabs and that the Arabs were fully capable of repelling any Israeli aggression. Syrian sources say that Israel is " sounding its war drums again" in its attempt to put an end to the peace process. Israel should "think a thousand times" before it embarks on an adventure against an Arab nation, particularly Syria. Syrian reports said.

The official Syrian press has mounted an all-out campaign against Israel. *Tishrin* wrote, "War between Syria and Israel is not a remote possibility. We call upon the international community to restrain Netanyahu." *Al-Thawra* wrote, "Netanyahu is stirring up a maniacal wind that feeds the grist of tension and escalates the language of aggression." *Al-Baath* accused Israel of "seeking to ignite new warfare in the region."

For its part, Israeli television announced that Syria has been conducting tests on its delivery systems for its long-range Scud-C missiles. It added that these missiles which have a range of 600km (373 miles) and can be equipped with a 500kg explosive charge or chemical or biological warheads are capable of striking the most densely populated cities in Israel. The tests have caused anxiety among Israeli military officials. Israeli television channel two's military correspondent reported, "The Syrian missile tests have provoked tension across the lines of contiguity between the two countries." Also, Zeev Manz, the director of the Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies, said, "The prospects of war with Israel have become increasingly tangible following the election of Netanyahu as prime minister of Israel." According to Israeli intelligence reports published in *Mosaic*, Syria possesses at least 20 mobile launchers for its Scud-C missiles and an arsenal of hundreds of missiles of different models. The Syrians have many enemies, the report continues, particularly Iraq and Turkey. However, the report said, "they may also want to give us the message that they will not stand by if we stand in military reinforcements to South Lebanon." It adds that 35,000 Syrian forces are stationed in Lebanon, while the Israeli army occupies a border zone of 850 square kilometres in the South.

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The verbal sabre rattling increased in intensity

Hetz-2 ground-to-ground anti-missile missiles since they were obtained by the Israeli army. The test was conducted in an Israeli base located near the southern coast of Israel under simulated war conditions. *Al-Ahram Weekly* learned that this test is to be followed by three more tests as part of Israel's programme to put in place an anti-missile defence network by the end of this century. This network would be able to defend Israel against the Chinese, North Korean and Soviet long-range missiles owned by countries in the Arab world by the end of this century, as well as against the long-range Katyusha rockets which Hezbollah may have obtained and which are capable of striking the entire area of Galilee. The network, which began to be implemented eight years ago, is heavily financed by the US. Israel will only pay 28 per cent of its estimated cost of \$322 million.

It is in this context that the ramifications of the statement made last week by General Eytan Ben Elihu, the commander of the Israeli air force, can be understood. He announced that, "In the very near future, Israel will be directly linked to American intelligence satellites, giving it immediate access to information in the event of a missile attack." He added that Israel would soon be making technical modifications on its radar warning devices which have up to now relied on signals relayed via Washington.

Israel has also accused Syria of escalating the war of words in its bid to eschew dialogue over Israel's "Lebanon first" proposal and appealed to the US to alleviate tensions. Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy announced that his government does not wish to maintain relations with Syria at the current level, which he described as wrong and dangerous, and be called upon officials in Damascus to reduce the level of tensions between the two countries. He added that the Syrian missile tests were signals of war and said, "If Syria wants peace, then it should not speak the language of missiles and arms."

Following a meeting held by the defence and foreign affairs committee of the Israeli Knesset in response to the alleged Syrian missile test, Netanyahu announced that "there are no new strategic factors in the Syrian-Israeli equation." He added, "Syria has been intent on arming itself with Scud missiles. All it is doing now is making the transition from buying them to manufacturing them itself. But

they are the same missiles with the same capacities." Netanyahu also said that he is waiting for Syria to respond to his offer that he relayed to Damascus via Washington to resume negotiations at the Wye Plantation in Maryland. These negotiations, he said, would be open to the discussion of any subject either side wishes to bring up.

The mystery behind the build-up in tension between the two countries can be traced to deliberate leaks to the press that Israel will have completed the formulation of an actual plan for war with Syria within a few months and that this plan will be put into effect in the event of any changes in the region that may prove detrimental to Israel. According to these reports, the plan is a response to intelligence Israel has received concerning a purported alliance between Syria and Iran against Israel and will rely on four general courses of action:

1- To strike and paralyse Syrian air defence systems within 48 hours, permitting Israeli control over Syrian air space.

2- To neutralise Syria's fighter planes by enhancing Israel's anti-aircraft systems and by subjecting any aircraft to intensive anti-aircraft fire before they cross the borders.

3- As Golan is considered a strategic zone belonging to Israel, military operations will be conducted beyond that zone.

4- To use its early warning systems to neutralise Syrian missiles before they arrive inside Israel.

The plan also apparently contains approximately 300 considerations of the various scenarios that could evolve on the Syrian front.

In light of these leaks, military advisers of the National Security Agency in Washington compiled a report in which they predicted a military confrontation if the climate in the region continues at its current level of tension, particularly if news of this report reached other countries in the region. The report, intended as advice to Israel, said, "Any escalation with the Arab countries will embroil Israel in a war that will encroach into Israel. Israel will be more on the defence than on the offence. The Arab countries now possess advanced long-range missiles that can reach Israel within moments of the outbreak of any new war in the region and Israeli losses will be far greater than those suffered by the Arab countries. If Israel decided to wage war against a single Arab country, the other Arab countries will take some military measures to

deter the Israeli assault."

The report also warned that any new engagements will take place primarily inside Israel and that if Israel attempts to have recourse to the use of nuclear weapons, it will bring as much harm to itself as to the Arabs, thus limiting its potential for use of these weapons. It advised Israel to proceed with extreme caution in southern Lebanon so as to avert any major clashes with Syria, Iran or other countries. It added that Egypt, among all the Arab countries, posed the greatest risk to Israeli security. It is close, it can be quick to act and it has great military capabilities. The report said that Egyptians have been very astute in the way they have concluded military agreements with numerous countries in the world, and that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is a man of peace, but he can become a man of war if the situation calls for it.

Such reports force Israel to face the fact that, although it can threaten the Arab world with its arsenal of nuclear and traditional weapons, the Arab countries have the capacity to threaten back.

The former Israeli air force commander Herzl Bodinger, in a press conference held last month on the occasion of his retirement, said, "For the first time since 1948 the Arab countries have come to possess the capacity to strike anywhere inside Israel. If a full-scale war broke out, Israel will be showered with hundreds of ground-to-ground missiles. That Egypt and Syria are now among those countries with the capacity to strike at targets inside Israel is very disturbing to the Israeli defence forces." In addition, a top-secret Israeli intelligence report obtained by the *Weekly* said that according to projections based on future arms purchasing agreements and the domestic production of ballistic missiles, there will be no less than 3,000 ballistic missiles in the Middle East within the next 10 years.

Against this background, how probable is a military confrontation between Syria and Israel? The short-term strategy of both countries excludes a full-scale war, although it is possible that they might engage in tactical manoeuvres that avert the potential of a direct clash. Rather than operations on the scale of "Grapes of Wrath," the purpose of these operations would be to force acquiescence or more concessions in the peace process. This is the context in which we should see the reviewed build-up in the region of deterrent weaponry.

The close observer of Israeli politics will note that Israel does indeed want to sign a peace agreement with Syria, but on its own terms. Israel is aware that it has more to gain from peace, particularly as it aspires to establish strong economic ties with the rest of the region. This will remain out of reach as long as the borders of any Arab country, near or far, remain closed to it. Perhaps this explains why Netanyahu was perturbed by Mubarak's statement last Thursday when he intimated that he was considering cancelling the economic summit due to be held in Cairo in November if there is no tangible progress in the peace process. The fact that Netanyahu hurried to dispatch David Levy, his foreign minister, to Egypt this week is a tacit recognition that Egyptian diplomacy was able to back him into a corner.

As for the purported plan to direct a military strike at Syria, this, too, can be understood as a way to induce Assad to parley with Netanyahu. This plan, which is believed to have been intentionally leaked by an Israeli security agency, is very inaccurate in its assessments of Syrian military capabilities.

According to the last edition of *Eastern Mediterranean*, a magazine specializing in defence issues published in the UK, the Syrian air force is capable of launching a lethal raid on Israel and Syrian aircraft, particularly its Su-24 planes, have the capacity to penetrate Israel and inflict severe damage on Israeli targets in Tel Aviv. Furthermore, Syria has more than purely tactical air capabilities and, although it would pay a heavy price for striking against Israel, its strikes would be very destructive to Israel, particularly if Syria used non-conventional weapons.

If Israel is unable to embark on or sustain such a war, the same applies to Syria if it is not guaranteed the support of other Arab countries, and particularly if it does not have on its side the active participation of Egypt. This is why Syrian intimations of war have never mentioned Syria alone, but have engaged the rhetoric of collective Arab action in the defence of Arab territories. In so doing, it is taking advantage of the climate established by the Arab summit meeting in Cairo last June. It is to be expected that Syria will urge other Arab countries to reassess their relations with Israel and to support Lebanese and Syrian demands and to declare their positions openly. This explains Sharaf's recent tour of some Arab capitals.

In addition to the above considerations, the present international order and the current conflict between the US and Europe render the international climate inimical to an armed conflagration in the Middle East.

# Korean miracle pales

**South Korean President Kim Young Sam's violent crackdown on demonstrating students may reflect a loss of control over the nation's economic and political future, writes Faiza Rady**



Father President Chung Doo-hwan was sentenced to death and Roh Tae-woo received 22 years (photo: AP)

A nine-day violent crackdown by riot police against student demonstrators at South Korea's Yonsei University ended on 22 August. President Kim Young Sam branded the young people as "revolutionary urban guerrillas advocating communism", and labelled the Federation of Student Councils, the group which had organised the protest rallies, as "anti-unification, anti-democratic and anti-state".

The students were demanding unification with North Korea, the withdrawal of some 35,000 US troops stationed in South Korea, the dismantling of the huge American bases scattered all over the country and a reversal of Kim's "US puppet policies". In response, Kim claimed that the students' line was identical to North Korea's. "Their action must be condemned," he said. "Such pro-North Korea violence will be sternly punished."

And punish them he did. In the strongest suppression of student activism in South Korea's history, police arrested some 5,715 "urban guerrillas" and "pro-North Korean student agents and stooges", after deploying a 20,000-strong riot police contingent in Seoul, as well as on the route leading to Paju — the village demarcating the border with North Korea, and around the "dangerously violent" but otherwise prestigious Yonsei University. Heavy security was in evidence in much of Seoul, especially around the US Embassy. Police frequently stopped young pedestrians and searched their bags, the Associated Press reported. And in a building near the city centre, police seized a cache of 500 firebombs and dozens of metal pipes — presumably stockpiled by the students.

During the final police raid, on 22 August, army helicopters dropped troops from the air while ground forces stormed the university campus, destroying makeshift barricades with high-powered bulldozers. Witnesses said that 12 helicopters and several armed vehicles fired tear gas as thousands of helmeted combat policemen raided the university, where some 6,000 students had gathered, reported *The Herald Tribune*. "Students fought back, beating the police with heavy metal pipes and throwing stones and firebombs. Stones, bricks and broken glass littered the main campus thoroughfare, where burned remains of tyres, desks and chairs set on fire by the students were left to smoulder. More than one thousand students and riot policemen were injured during the assault."

As Seoul's jails filled with students, Pyongyang — the North Korean capital — condemned the crackdown. "If they [the Kim government] truly want to negotiate with the North, they must stop the repression and allow free discussion of reunification," said a statement carried by the official media. Meanwhile, Ryu Se-Hong and To Jong-Hwan, two students who had flown to Pyongyang via Berlin to demonstrate the South Korean students' solidarity with the North, denounced the Seoul government for "ruthlessly violating human rights". The students said that the Kim administration should "stop walking away [from reunification] and demanding the largest number of people ever in history and immediately release the students, who had fought a just fight." In London, the human rights group Amnesty International expressed concern that police might further mistreat detained students.

Some South Korean intellectuals accuse Kim of attacking the students, in an effort to woo conservatives, whose votes went to independents or opposition candidates in last May's parliamentary elections. "The harshness of the crackdown reflects the conservative line of Kim's administration, which saw its power base gradually erode this year with his reform drive tapering off," said Lee Phil-Sang, a political science professor at Korea University. And the liberal opposition party, the National Congress for New Politics (NCNP), denounced the government's right-wing approach to the unification question. "Kim's government has followed past authoritarian regimes by excluding liberals in formulating its unification policy," said Park Hong-Yup, an NCNP spokesperson. The Kim administration's anachronistic stand on the North/South question is illustrated by a bizarre recent incident. On 20 August, South Korean novelist Kim Hah-ki was arrested for breaking the national security law which prohibits any unauthorized contact with the Communists in the North. Kim, who had mistakenly crossed the border in a drunken stupor, was duly returned by Pyongyang and had then to

apologise to the government for his "grave crime".

Recent events indicate that Kim is intent on a demonstration of power on all fronts: the police-student battles coincided with South Korea's annual war games, reported to be the most obvious flexing of military might to date, assisted, as always, by the US army.

Then, on 21 August, the day before the final crackdown on the students, Seoul residents were warned by loudspeakers that there was a heightened probability of North Korean "provocation" because of the communist state's recent economic problems, which have made it dependent on foreign aid. A questionable scenario to say the least, which *The Guardian* described as "most unlikely". Air raid sirens blared at 11am as two F-16 and two F-4 jet fighters appeared out of the northern skies, swooped over the capital and headed back north. Nationally, 24 other jets simulated similar lightning raids on 37 cities, ostensibly to "boost the nation's security awareness", according to Cho Woon-Gil, the civil defence headquarters' director. Pyongyang accused the South of using intimidation tactics by staging a "frantic war game and creating an atmosphere of real war. Lurking behind this is a sinister intention to call out police, government officials and the army to repress pro-unification patriotic forces," commented the North Korean Central News Agency.

This fuelling of renewed unease and hostility towards the Communist regime was perhaps undertaken with the aim of distracting the people from South Korea's inner turmoil. After five decades of US-backed and installed dictatorships, Kim Young Sam, the first democratically elected South Korean president, faces tremendous opposition — over and beyond last week's student protest. "His domestic policies of reform have alienated his own supporters, who are turning against him. He is hemmed in by corruption allegations that threaten to engulf the entire political class. His foreign policies have been ineffectual. He is deeply unpopular," assessed *The Economist*.

Unlike his predecessors, who established a capitalist economy while strictly protecting the national industrial base through tariffs and foreign investment restrictions, Kim has started to deregulate, a requirement imposed by South Korea's application to join the prestigious Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Despite being in the US zone of influence since its inception in 1945, South Korea has maintained one of the world's most protected markets — a plausible reason for its economic success story and strong growth rate, estimated at 7.7 per cent this year. In 1993, South Korea ranked as the first naval producer worldwide with a 39 per cent share of the global market; it was the fifth manufacturer of textiles, petrochemicals, electronics, steel products and motors. And there are other indications of prosperity: the average lifespan increased from 59.9 years in 1960 to 70.4 years in 1993, and illiteracy has been practically eradicated.

Under the Kim administration, however, the requirements of globalisation — along with increasing deregulation — have already changed the picture. Although unemployment is still low, economists predict that it is bound to increase because of computerisation and the relatively high cost of Korean labour. Many South Korean multinationals have already relocated to countries with cheaper labour pools. Samsung, for example, has invested \$500 million to produce semi-conductors and refrigerators in Suzhou, China. Lucky Goldstar has similarly invested heavily in local Chinese production and sales. And Samsung, Goldstar and Daewoo have all opened subsidiaries in Brazil, Argentina and Mexico, where labour costs are considerably cheaper. In this unprotected and rapidly deregulated economy, South Korean workers will eventually become "redundant" as the saying goes — unable to compete against blind market forces over which they have no control.

The loss of control over the country's economic and political — future may have been at the crux of last week's demonstrations at Yonsei University. A loss of national control over the economy and a loss of political control to the US forces that impose their own agenda on compliant "puppet" politicians. When the protesting students chanted for "socialism" and "reunification", they were demanding to regain control over their destiny.

## Cypriot crossroads

**The clashes in the UN buffer zone in Cyprus underlined the urgent need to resolve the conflict, reports Doaa El-Bey**

By crossing the United Nations buffer zone separating the Turkish and Greek parts of Cyprus earlier this month, Greek Cypriot bikers aimed at protesting against the division of their island. The act triggered clashes between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots. It was a grim reminder that the conflict in Cyprus is still unresolved.

Greek Cypriot bikers protesting the Turkish occupation of the northern part of Cyprus stormed into the UN buffer zone throwing stones at Turkish troops. Clashes took place when Turkish troops responded with gunfire and stones. These clashes, described as the worst outbreak of violence since the division of the island in 1974, left two Greek Cypriots dead and a dozen people injured from both sides.

Turkey occupied the northern third of Cyprus in response to a coup aimed at uniting the island with Greece. Turkish Cypriots declared their own state nine years later, but it was only recognised by Ankara. Although Cyprus has been an independent island since 1960, it has never been able to resolve the conflict between the 600,000 Greek Cypriots and the 150,000 Turkish Cypriots.

Each community blamed the clashes on the other. Nalan Kazazoglu, the press counsellor at the Turkish Embassy in Cairo, blamed the biker problem on the Greek politicians and officials. "Instead of bringing them to reason, they expressed their support and even posed with the cyclists before the cameras although the intention of the bikers to cross the whole of Cyprus was known. The young bikers have been the victims of the irresponsible provocation by the Greek and Cypriot officials." She believed that clashes in Cyprus could be prevented in the future if both communities respect the rights of the other.

Kazazoglu said that the Turkish government and the government of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) believe that negotiation is the only way to find a solution. "In the present situation, this is the only reasonable thing to do," she added. Kazazoglu stressed that this is not the time for accusing any government or organisation but of reason and calmness. "Accusations and provocation could only worsen the situation. The two communities in Cyprus should come together and find the best solution," she said. She was referring to the Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş's proposal to meet Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides to resolve the Cypriot problem.

The Greek Cypriots blamed the violence on the Turkish troops. Yorgos Coutoumis, the press counsellor at the Greek Embassy in Cairo, said that the latest events can be attributed to the barbaric behaviour of the Turkish occupation troops and the mercenary members of the [Turkish extremist] Grey Wolves Group who turned a peaceful march by unarmed bikers to a bloody protest.

He said that for negotiations between Denktaş and Clerides to bear fruits, "there must be an agreement on the basic principles underlined by the UN to resolve the Cypriot problem". He said that Clerides is not against talks with Denktaş, but is trying to set the stage that would guarantee the success of the negotiations.

The government of Cyprus requests the support of the international community to seek a just, viable and lasting solution to the Cyprus problem that would end the Turkish occupation and restore the human rights and basic freedoms of all Cypriots.

The US described the events in Cyprus as tragic. The State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said that these events underscore once again the need to reach a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus. "We intend to continue our efforts to seek common ground between the two communities and achieve a lasting agreement on a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation that will enable all Cypriots to live together in a peaceful and prosperous Cyprus."

Russia called for indirect talks between Denktaş and Clerides as soon as possible. The Russian permanent representative to the UN, Ambassador Sergei Lavrov, said indirect talks should be initiated by the UN Secretary-General's special representative in Cyprus, Han Sung-Joo. The UN condemned both sides and urged them to renounce violence. The Security Council president, Antonius Eitell, called on both sides to prevent provocative acts and to ensure full respect of the UN buffer zone. He pointed to the need for a peaceful and durable political solution of the Cyprus problem. The UN's mission is not easy, but at least its mediation is acceptable by both communities.

"Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots are backing the mission of good offices of UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali and other countries to bring the two communities together in order to start dialogue and believe that a peaceful and just solution can only be reached by negotiations," Kazazoglu said. "The UN can play a very active role in coordinating the other parties' initiatives to resolve the Cypriot problem." Coutoumis said. He named the US and the European Community as possible mediators.

Coutoumis regarded the United States' role as vital for maintaining security in Cyprus. "It is obvious that the Cypriot problem can explode at any time, and the best way to avoid an explosion is to find a quick solution," he said. He predicted that the solution will not come overnight, but can be reached after the US presidential elections in November.

Concerning the role of the European Community, Coutoumis said that the EU can play an important role in solving the problem in Cyprus. As the EU accepts Cyprus' request for membership, it is called to prove the interest shown by its officials in finding a solution to a mainly European problem.

The Turkish Cypriots agree with the Greeks on the major American role in resolving the Cypriot crisis after the US presidential elections. "Although there is a strong Greek lobby in the US, I do not think the US government will take a new or different attitude concerning the Cyprus issue before the elections," Kazazoglu said. She ruled out a possible EU role, "except in the framework of the UN mission of good offices" because the EU favours the application of the Greek-Cypriot side to EU membership. "The countries of the EU, like the Greek Cypriots, have acted as if there is only one state and one community in Cyprus. With this attitude Europe backed the Greek side, and willingly or unwillingly, this attitude has worsened the situation in the island," she said.

## Chrysanthemum and crescent

Why has Japan chosen to acquire a more palpable presence in the Middle East as part of its global strategy, wonders Gamal Nkrumah

Japan, more than any other country in the world, can afford to have a gross domestic product of \$5.1 trillion and a GDP per capita of \$40,500. The US, in comparison, has a GDP per capita of \$28,000. Still, Japan's political prowess on the international arena has always been in question. Why?

Do not be fooled by Japan's forbidding facade. Traditionally, the problem with Japan's post-World War II foreign policy was not the Japanese wallet, but the Japanese will to play a more assertive role internationally. For all its economic might, Japan is obliged to rely almost entirely on the United States for its defence and security needs. It foots the bill, but America calls the shots. Ja-

pan is also utterly dependent on the volatile Middle Eastern oil markets to meet its energy needs.

For all its riches, Japan is energy poor, and the nation's unquenchable thirst for oil lies at the heart of its relations with the Middle East. Japan accounts for 70 per cent of Asia's oil imports and imports 80 per cent of its energy needs. Notwithstanding the impressive success of fuel conservation campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s, Japan has a \$50 billion annual oil import bill.

Last week, Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda visited Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Israel and met with leaders of the Palestinian self-rule authority. Ikeda stopped at the headquarters of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

(UNDOF) in Syria. He reiterated Japan's "land-for-peace" concept as the basis for peace and announced the extension of Japan's grant-in-aid to the Palestinian Authority. Japan is one of the Palestinians' major benefactors. Through the Japan-Palestine Development Fund and other international organisations, Japan provides some \$176 million in aid to the Palestinians. Direct Japanese cash aid to the Palestinians amounts to some \$42 million — a total bill of nearly \$220 million.

In the past, the Japanese role in the Middle East peace process amounted to providing succour to the crushed Palestinian refugees and, more recently, to the cash-strapped Palestinian National Authority (PNA). But now both the PNA and the Palestinians' Arab neighbours expect Japan to play a more assertive role in resolving the current political impasse that has effectively halted the Middle Eastern peace process.

America holds the fate of the Middle East peace process in its hands. But Japan is far more dependent on Middle Eastern oil than America. With far fewer future alternative energy resources than the United States, Japan desperately needs a steady supply of Middle East oil. A peaceful and prosperous Middle East is of critical importance to Japanese policy makers. Peace in the Middle East is of vital strategic interest to Japan.

For years, attempts to promote an animated and meaningful dialogue between Japan and Arab countries have founders in Spain. There was goodwill on both sides, but the fundamental issue is not of trust, but of policy. Can Japanese-Arab relations be seriously considered without taking into account American dictates? Can Japan afford to have an independent Middle Eastern policy — one that is free of American calculations?

In international relations, Japan does not push its weight around. But it does not particularly relish its role as the world's unranked paymaster either. Considering its enormous economic clout, Japan deserves to be taken more seriously by the international community. Japan aims at being a big international player, and what better playground in which to prove its mettle than in the Middle East — a point made by Ikeda during his Middle

Eastern trip. Nevertheless, Japan is still sending two contradicting and confusing signals. One insists that Japan, as an economic superpower, has an independent foreign policy. The other emphasises that Japan is a close American ally.

Ambassador Yoshio Hatano, president of the Foreign Press Centre of Japan and a former ambassador of Japan to the United Nations, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Japan is keen to have a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, a bid supported by UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali. Japan, in turn, endorses Ghali's bid for re-election to a second term in office. Ghali has in the past frequently expressed frustration with what he termed "the lack of Japanese planetary perspective". However,

he has long appreciated Japan's invaluable contributions to the UN's peacekeeping operations around the world, including in the Middle East.

Despite the fact that the cultural dynamics between Japan and the Middle East lack the depth that characterises Japanese ties to some other parts of the world, cultural attitudes have been shifting. Individuals like the Japanese ambassador to Egypt, Kuniaki Kataoka, one of a handful of Japanese Arabists, and Keiko Sakai, senior research officer at the Middle East Project of Tokyo's Institute of Developing Economies, who is stationed in Egypt, are hard at work to unveil the mystery surrounding Japan in the Arab world. A former senior vice president of the influential Japan Foundation, Ambassador Kataoka has written about Arab-Japanese relations. In an interview with the *Weekly*, Kataoka concurred with Hatano that "a mental distance" as distinct from the "geographical distance" still separates Arabs from Japan.

While retaining its position as the world's largest aid donor, Japan now has its own economic problems. Unemployment hit 3.5 per cent in June of this year, a grim reminder that full economic recovery still has some way to go. Nevertheless, the Japanese gross domestic product (GDP) grew at its fastest rate for nearly a quarter of a century. More important for the Middle East is the fact that Japanese firms are increasing investment overseas, despite the recent weakening of the yen against

the dollar and the persisting fears that the Japanese economy has still not fully recovered from the recession that cost it an estimated \$150 billion per year.

This week, Japanese firms surveyed by the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* daily said that they would increase capital investment overseas by 11.6 per cent in the year to March 1997. The figure exceeds the planned 8.9 per cent increase in domestic capital spending. The percentage of Japanese firms' total production undertaken overseas is expected to increase from 12.1 per cent in 1995-96 to an estimated 13.1 per cent in 1996-97. According to Reuters, this compares unfavourably with a 14.5 per cent rise for Japanese foreign investment and a 21.9 per cent rise in domestic spending in the fiscal year to March 1996. But the generally



Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda and PLO leader Yasir Arafat in the Gaza Strip (photo: Reuters)

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# ed to Lebed

The fragile cease-fire in Chechnya seems to hinge on how much the Chechen separatists trust General Lebed with their aspirations, writes **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow

The Russians are not to be trusted. But President Yeltsin's special envoy to Chechnya, Alexander Lebed, is trustworthy. This seems to be the verdict of the Chechen people. Indeed, having rejected the so-called "Tatarstan option", their only hope of salvation now lies with Lebed. He alone appears to stand between them and Russian wrath. But what is the Tatarstan option?

Tatarstan is a landlocked autonomous Muslim republic in the heart of the Russian Federation. It is predominantly Muslim and populated by the Tatars, descendants of the Golden Horde who ruled Russia for four centuries. Tatarstan is rich in oil, timber and many minerals and retains complete control of its many natural resources. Although it has ceded all foreign affairs and defence matters to Russia, it has, through agreements with the Kremlin, preserved home rule.

The Tatars have learned to live with the Russians and have a voice in Russian politics. But efforts by the president of Tatarstan to mediate between fellow Muslims in Chechnya and the Russians to resolve their differences have been steadfastly rebuffed. The Chechens insist that unlike the Tatars, they have in the past refused to vote in Russian presidential elections — and shall not do so in the future.

In December 1994, Russian President Boris Yeltsin sent troops to crush the separatist movement following the Chechen declaration of sovereignty in 1991. Over 30,000 Chechen civilians perished in the ensuing bloodbath.

The Chechen people are unlikely to either forget or forgive the Russians for the atrocities committed by the occupying army against Chechen civilians.

Lebed contends that the negotiations are still on track. Lebed's success in resolving the Chechen crisis is crucial to his political future in Russia. His many enemies in the Kremlin would be delighted if he failed in Chechnya and are busy working for his demise. The Russian generals in Chechnya did their level best to thwart Lebed's plans in the latest cease-fire negotiations. The Chechen separatists, for their part, want to deal with Lebed only, and nobody else. Lebed's foes are furious.

Chechen negotiators struggled last week to maintain and consolidate an informal cease-fire between Russia and the Chechen separatists. Lebed battled with his hard-line Kremlin opponents to impose the terms of the latest Russian-Chechen agreement.

"The differences are not so great as to block negotiations", a spokesman for Lebed, Alexander Budanov, said. But the informal cease-fire, reached last Saturday, did not prevent a mass exodus of Chechen civilians from the Chechen capital, Grozny. The city's residents dread a potential escalation of hostilities and further suffering under Russian occupation. They feel that the world is indifferent to their plight in deference to Russia's might. Russia's Federal Migration Service registered some 10,000 new refugees from Grozny in Chechnya and 5,000 in Ingushetia. Still, the outside world has done little to alleviate the Chechens' plight.



Chechen fighters celebrate their victories over the Russian occupying forces (photo: AP)

Although a truce has been in effect since 14 August, both sides have accused the other of violating the agreement. Top Chechen commander Arslan Maskhadov said that Russian soldiers had killed and tortured Chechens, including women and children. The Chechens said that Russian warplanes bombed civilians leaving Grozny on 18 August, killing and wounding hundreds of people. And Russian forces claimed to have killed 40 Chechen fighters in a surprise assault on a bus and lorries southwest of Grozny on 19 August.

It is also alleged that Chechen freedom fighters repelled three columns of armoured vehicles trying to enter the Chechen capital on 17 August — reportedly killing 40 Russian soldiers during the fighting.

During his negotiations with the resistance, Lebed, who strongly criticised Yeltsin's war-mongering in the breakaway republic, agreed that the Russian army would retreat from Chechnya — except for the capital — in exchange for the Chechen retreat from Grozny. The agreement also included plans to establish a national congress representing the Chechen people, general elections and eventual talks on the future political status of the republic.

The Russian settlement efforts came on the heels of a successful Chechen offensive against the occupation forces in Grozny on 6 August, which the resistance regained control of most of central Grozny, including key strategic administrative buildings and checkpoints, formerly controlled by the Russian army. Consequently, Yeltsin immediately ordered Lebed to "free government buildings,

checkpoints and places where Russian units are posted". The Chechen attack on Grozny left more than 1,000 Russian soldiers dead or wounded and has once again humiliated the powerful and prestigious army of the former superpower.

In this context that Lebed, who supported Chechen independence during his presidential campaign, bakes to save Russia's face. The Lebed initiative was well received by the Chechen resistance.

Separatist leader Maskhadov respects Lebed. But the top Russian commander on the Chechen question is revealed to be Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov, officially in charge of the troops in Grozny. In an evident skirmish over the conflicting delegation of power between his ministry and the national security adviser, Kulikov embarrassed Lebed by asking him to report on the Chechen assault — despite the presence of tens of thousands of Russian soldiers and a contingent of intelligence officers in Chechnya. Lebed responded at a press conference calling for Kulikov's resignation, accusing him of failure and incompetence. Apparently believing that Lebed had become too big for his boots, Yeltsin criticised him for his public stand, expressed his full confidence in Kulikov and asked him "to carry on the work".

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Nevertheless, Lebed also seemed wary of his promotion to principal Chechnya troubleshooter. "There are corridor intrigues and they want me to break my neck," he commented. Yet, a successful settlement of the Chechen conflict would consolidate Lebed's political power and could eventually propel him to the presidency — a possibility that seems very real given Yeltsin's fast failing health.

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## Peace prices

Credit must be given where credit is due and, in this case, Netanyahu deserves a pat on the back for finally agreeing to meet with Arafat. His decision to meet the Palestinian leader came after roughly four months of stunts that have stymied efforts to move the peace process along in accordance to agreements struck in the past. Unfortunately, Netanyahu's policy shift did not result from an epiphany realisation that peace, security and economic prosperity must be pursued in tandem. Nor was it due to the dawning that the current Likud administration is obliged to follow through with promises signed by the previous Labour government. Rather, it came from hitting Netanyahu where it hurt the most — the wallet.

Last Monday, President Mubarak threatened to cancel the Cairo Economic Summit, scheduled for November, if Israel did not get back on track with the peace process. Netanyahu's response was that of someone who has had his bluff called. He promised to resume talks with the Palestinians in the near future.

While this is a promising note in an otherwise troubling tale, one wonders why such threats must be made in the first place for pledges and promises to be worth more than the paper on which they are written. Any statesman would have realised that peace and security exist in a symbiotic relationship, and once realised, more likely than not will provide the necessary environment for economic prosperity on a regional level. Yet, Netanyahu opted for a stalemate, thinking that the Arabs would be passive and accept the fact that what Israel wants, Israel gets. He thought wrong.

Every country in the region, including the Palestinians who seek a homeland, and the Israeli's who would deny them this right, have a vested interest in peace. Netanyahu as a leader, versus a sound-bite cowboy, can afford to let his wallet and the rhetoric spouted by his extremist bedfellows, dictate his policies. The price to be paid if peace is not realised by far exceeds that which will be due if Israel attempts to practice the same isolationist policies espoused and embraced by their Republican allies in Congress.

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## A gathering in Ramallah

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses a hypothetical scenario that raises fundamental questions touching on the very essence of the Arab-Israeli conflict

Let us imagine a group of Israeli opposition parties coming together on a common platform that would include the recognition of a sovereign Palestinian state, the adoption of the principle of the exchange of land (including the Golan) for peace, the establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of both Israel and Arab Palestine and a ban on new settlements. Taking the idea further, let us imagine that those parties try to solicit popular Arab support for their programme by holding a meeting in Ramallah, say, and inviting representatives of Arab opposition parties to join them in adopting these principles as a basis for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. This brings us to the question of whether any Arab opposition party would be willing to meet with their Israeli counterparts, however worthy the cause.

It is a question worth pondering at a time when the total impasse reached by the peace process entails a rethinking not only of the mechanisms devised for its implementation but of the peace strategy itself. The most critical issue raised by the question is whether the Arab parties would be willing to give up their traditional policy of boycotting Israel and all things Israeli, lock, stock and barrel. When I put the question to a meeting of Egyptian strategists recently, it provoked a heated debate which remained inconclusive. Before going any further, we must be clear on what such a proposal would entail.

Arab popular forces outside state power structures continue to boycott all Israelis indiscriminately. For the boycott is, by its very

nature, indivisible. It cannot be applied selectively to one part of Israeli society and not another. Even within Arab state structures, there are those who believe the boycott to be a useful weapon that should not be abandoned as long as Israel does not respond to the requirements of an overall peace. If this sort of thinking was justified at the time of the 'dovish' Peres, it is even more justified now that Netanyahu is in power.

Actually, the Arab boycott of Israel is a practical manifestation of the more fundamental issue of Arab recognition of Israel at the grassroots level, where many believe that, given the lack of parity between the parties, the current peace process is unlikely to produce a stable peace. At best, they see it as offering only a temporary respite from protracted open conflict. According to this logic, the Arabs should not take irreversible steps towards normalisation, such as lifting the boycott, as this would jeopardise future opportunities to eliminate the Zionist threat. An act of solidarity between Arabs and Israel at the grassroots level is therefore no ordinary issue, but comes up against a basic tenet of the Arab strategic thinking which prevailed throughout the long confrontation with Israel.

On the other hand, the current political structure inside Israel is the weakest element in Netanyahu's overall strategy. Israel has been successful, particularly under the Rabin/Peres stewardship, in sowing dissent within Arab ranks by convincing each party that it stood to gain more by dealing separately with Israel than through collective Arab action. This goes

a long way towards explaining the lamentable lack of coordination that has marked the course of Arab negotiations with Israel since the Madrid conference. The Oslo negotiations were conducted secretly, the Jordanian-Israeli treaty was hammered out without the knowledge of the other Arab parties, and it took a Likud victory and Netanyahu's repudiation of the land-for-peace formula to bring about an Arab summit in a bid to re-establish some sort of common front.

Netanyahu alleges that he does not set preconditions for peace. But this is a misleading allegation, if only because occupation of territory is in itself the most important precondition by which Israel can impose its own agenda. The best way for the Arabs to offset the Israeli advantage is to act on forces within Israel who do not espouse the Netanyahu agenda of giving precedence to Israel's security over peace, even at the price of jeopardising Arab security, and peace.

Israel is unsuprisingly when it comes to exacerbating inter-Arab contradictions; the Arabs should have no compunction about playing a similar game within Israel. This can be achieved by encouraging the peace camp in Israel and giving it concrete assurances that full normalisation is possible in exchange for an equitable peace that responds to legitimate Arab aspirations. The Arab strategy should not be limited to accepting the Netanyahu rationale of 'pragmatism', which boils down to addressing only the issues that threaten Israel's security.

Netanyahu believes that Arab diplomacy has

no other choice, but recent events belie this sanguine assumption. Cairo has recently threatened to call off the economic summit it is hosting next November if no progress is realised on the bilateral tracks with Syria and the Palestinians, while Arafat met with Peres last week in defiance of the established practice of not interfering in internal Israeli affairs. This logic can be taken to its ultimate conclusion with Arab popular forces responding positively to an invitation from their Israeli counterparts.

In this connection, it might be useful to recall the recent furor that met French philosopher Roger Garaudy's latest book, *The Founding Myths of Israeli Policy*, in which he presents strong evidence to suggest that the number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust was in reality far below the six million that is commonly accepted as an incontrovertible truth. So much so that any attempt to cast doubt on the accuracy of the figure, which constitutes an essential building block of Israel's legitimacy, is considered an act of anti-Semitism. Arab intellectuals were right to denounce the persecution to which Garaudy was subjected for daring to contest the figure. But on the occasion of a recent visit by Garaudy to Beirut, Damascus and Amman, a number of articles by Arab intellectuals questioned the wisdom of belittling the suffering of the Jews, on the grounds that Arab recognition of the legitimacy of Jewish fears is the best way of compelling Jews to recognise the legitimacy of Arab fears and defeat extremists like Netanyahu.

## Time for a change of direction

The policies of the '70s and '80s are outdated today, and unequivocal support for Syria and Lebanon may well be the answer of the late '90s, writes Abdel-Khalek Farouk

The past months have been witness to a clear shift in Egyptian political and media discourse regarding the United States and American policy in the Middle East. Severe denunciation of the US's flagrant bias towards Israel has become a notable feature of political commentary across the political spectrum. Nevertheless, this change in perception and attitude has not as yet been reflected in a commensurate change in political behaviour.

The premise of a possible "imperial" American role in the Arab-Israeli conflict has guided Egyptian diplomacy since before Sadat. Since 1969, we can see an attempt to tip the strategic balance in US-Israel and US-Egyptian relations in such a way as to sway the US into playing a major role in rolling back the effects of Israel's victory in the June 1967 War, and achieve a political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict that maintains a minimum of Arab and Palestinian rights.

Two phases in Egyptian diplomacy, aimed at effecting a certain impact on the American strategy, can be identified. The first phase began with Sadat's 4 February 1971 initiative, followed by policies aimed at gaining a foothold in the list of US priorities (the expulsion of the Soviet experts, the kilometre 101 negotiations, etc.) then his visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 and his well-known assertion that "99 per cent of the cards in the game are in the hands of the United States". This policy resulted in the complete isolation of Egypt from the rest of the Arab world.

The second phase began in 1982. The new Egyptian leadership made efforts to contain the impact of Sadat's unrestrained policies and return Egypt to the regional arena, simultaneously attempting to emerge as a neutral and acceptable mediator in the regional struggle and the negotiation process that was being prepared between Israel and several Arab states (and sponsored by the American administration).

Since then, Egypt's perception and methodology have emphasised the preservation of this role as a regional "bridge" acceptable to all the negotiating parties. This status guarantees the continuity of American economic and military assistance to especially the Israeli-Turkish alliance, means that the region is vulnerable to any military attack from several sides. Iranian movements in the Gulf, and foreign nuclear and non-nuclear threats to the region, all disrupt regional equilibrium and require an Egyptian role receptive to Arab needs

and ready to protect Syria from possible military aggression and Iraq from disintegration.

Fourth, newly mobile borders, the racial and ethnic dissolution of relatively static political entities (Iraq, Sudan, etc.) and the sanctions imposed on several Arab countries require in Egypt a policy that gives priority to strategic factors over old feuds and enmities.

Fifth, Syria, which is an active and effective party to the process of political settlement, is still residing American, Israeli and Turkish pressures, and has preserved a degree of negotiating leverage.

Egypt could participate in the "settlement battle" more positively than is currently the case in order to seize the opportunities that are now in danger of being forfeited. The dangers posed by the ascendancy of the extremist Zionist right in Israel require a new Egyptian political methodology: full support of Syria and Lebanon in the settlement negotiations, and the renunciation of a role as mediator or neutral spectator in the regional conflict. This state of affairs can achieve a number of strategic objectives. If Egypt strongly supports Syria and Lebanon in the negotiations, this would send a clear message to decision-makers in the United States and other Western countries that Cairo is still a competent pressure point in the region.

Consequently, this would reinforce the political process aiming at creating "an Arab strategic critical mass" capable of tipping the balance in the region and putting an end to Israeli and Western hegemony.

An Egyptian attitude that clearly supports the Syrians and the Lebanese would put pressure on the Israeli right. Egyptian support would also consolidate the status of the Palestinian negotiators during an extremely difficult period of negotiation.

A clear-cut Egyptian attitude in this instance would do much to remedy the current state of collapse, and Arab intellectual and political divisions.

The writer is a researcher in economic and strategic affairs

## The Press This Week

## Running out of patience

**Al-Ahram:** "Instead of complaining about the continuation of settlement building we should prepare ourselves to confront normalisation in all its forms. We should embark on an organised plan to urge every shop or cafe owner to refuse to sell any Israeli product and denounce those that do... Boycott Israeli products and activities and you will stop settlement building!... It's either that or a flood of settlements creating a new status quo and bringing about a new popular reaction." (Abdel-Aal El-Bagoury, 23 August)

**Al-Wafd:** "President Mubarak hit the mark when he warned Israel that the Netanyahu administration's provocations and its refusal to honour its commitments would have a negative effect on the peace process and threaten the possibility of holding the economic summit... Whether it is held on schedule or not, Israel's commitment building and its refusal to honour its commitments will render its failure inevitable." (Samia El-Said, 26 August)

**Al-Akhbar:** "Like Nero weeping before a burning Rome, Netanyahu is doing everything in his power to turn the clock back to the '60s and early '70s, to spread the spectre of war, and to increase Palestinian violence in face of Israeli terrorism. Netanyahu's fires are many—he has decided to halt the peace process, and Israel under his rule will not respect its commitments to any previous accord be it Oslo, Taib or even Sharm El-Sheikh." (Wagih Abu Zikri, 23 August)

**Rose El-Youssef:** "Perhaps Netanyahu believes that he is able to re-draw the region's map geographically, demographically and politically. This is a big illusion for he is not the only player capable of obstructing others' plans. And the great number of players with interests in the region lessens the possibility of unlimited US support for his policies after the presidential elections next November." (Mahmoud El-Mashari, 26 August)

**Al-Gomhouria:** "Beating the drums of war and waging of a future war with Syria is a hollow Israeli trick, used many times before, to draw attention away from Israel's settlement-building policies which stand against the spirit of peace — a just and comprehensive peace... The solution lies in quick American action to uphold the principle of 'land for peace' and adopt an even-handed approach towards the parties concerned. The

**Close up**

Salama A. Salama

**Wrong man for the job**

Last September, just as the UN was celebrating its 50th anniversary, I wrote that the future of the organisation looked far from certain. The US was then spearheading a campaign to curtail the activities of the UN, particularly when it came to peace keeping operations. It was a campaign that received the wholehearted support of the Republican majority in Congress, which was demanding that the US government refrain from involvement in any peace keeping operations in the future except those under US command.

At that time Washington had not yet voiced its categorical opposition to Boutros Ghali assuming a second term of office as secretary-general. On the contrary, at a function held on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the UN, President Clinton heaped praise on Boutros Ghali, a gesture later explained somewhat disingenuously by Madeline Albright as a casual compliment uttered by a president who had been brought up to be polite.

The American position has subsequently become clear, and as the battle to elect, or to deselect, Boutros Ghali for a second term moves inexorably on, US manoeuvring looks suspiciously like an attempt to provoke a crisis by fuelling differences between UN members, the intention being to eventually call into question not just the mandate of the secretary-general but the role of the organisation itself.

In a recent speech Bob Dole appeared to sound the Republican clarion call when he insisted that "when [he becomes] president, every man and woman in our armed forces will know that the president of the US is the commander-in-chief, not Boutros Ghali nor any other secretary-general of the United Nations."

This empty piece of rhetoric drew large applause from Republican Congress members, while one senior analyst on the *New York Times* read it as a caricature of the secretary-general, roaming the corridors of the organisation dressed one day as an American general, another as a Russian admiral, and a third as an Indian chief-of-staff.

Another American commentator had the good grace to point out that no one had benefitted quite as much from the UN, certainly since the end of the Korean War, or had used it as often for its own purposes, as America itself. The UN was the main channel through which America built its alliance against Saddam Hussein, the main instrument through which it sought to realise its aims in Haiti. As to US service personnel not partaking in UN peace keeping missions, in Somalia US forces were kept under US rather than UN command. And in addition to the political and military benefits that the US has reaped, the very fact that the UN headquarters are in New York pumps enormous funds into the city.

Madeleine Albright and the Clinton administration, however, seem as immune to reasoned argument as the Republicans. Which leads one to the conclusion that the otherwise inexplicable desire of the US to ditch Dr Boutros Ghali is actually the opening shot in a battle intended to strip the international organisation of any mandate to deal with international disputes. This being the case, Boutros Ghali is certainly not the man they would like to see heading the UN. He is of far too high a calibre.

Gomasho  
3-96**Soapbox****The real cause**

The events in Jordan between 17-18 August are similar to those that occurred in Egypt in January 1977. Egypt, having emerged victorious from the October War, had then been too eager to enjoy the fruits of victory. The economic situation was dire, a fact that the government concealed. Officials constantly predicted an imminent reduction in prices, until, of course, the morning press of 17 January published a list of basic commodities the prices of which had doubled. Riots ensued.

Years later the same scenario has been replayed in Jordan. Peace with Israel, rather than ushering in immediate prosperity, was followed by increases in the prices of basic commodities, most significantly bread. The angry masses took to the street, and King Hussein was left with no choice but to call in the army to restore order, much as Sadat had done 19 years before.

But there are other lessons that might be learned by drawing a comparison between events in Egypt and Jordan. At the time Sadat blamed the communists as being the real instigators of the Egyptian riots. King Hussein has adopted a similar ploy, only he cites "foreign powers" as the culprits "behind the incidents" in his country. While both Sadat's and Hussein's accounts may contain some kernel of truth, we should not ignore the fact that the angry reactions of the public to price hikes is precisely that — an angry reaction to prices being raised without any prior notice or discussion.

The excuse for such secrecy is usually that otherwise merchants would stockpile in an attempt to make greater profits. But such profiteering on the part of traders is surely a lesser evil than rioting. Merchants could, if they were caught doing this kind of thing, be penalised appropriately.

We learned this lesson back in 1977 though it seems to be a lesson other countries have still to learn.

*This week's Soapbox speaker is a senior columnist at Al-Ahram.*



Salah Montasser

**A scenario of reluctant progress**

A settlement in the Middle East? Tahseen Basheer suggests three possible scenarios that stand a little short of war — and peace

Prediction is a dangerous game in the Middle East. The quiet sands of the political desert look permanent, yet are quickly stirred into volleys of sand, whether *khamasit* or Desert Storm. After the storm, there usually is a hull, during and after which people start trying to make sense of the changes or non-changes left behind.

In the Middle East, one could argue that there is nothing new under the sun, yet people feel born anew every day. The resurrection of memory, by design or stream of consciousness, plays an important part in everyday reality. This makes playing prophets especially risky. If the prophecy proves credible, messiahs emerge; but if it fails, another name is added to the long list of pseudo-prophets.

Thus I envision future scenarios with trepidation. With the above caveats, I restrict my predictions to the immediate and short-term time span. In forecasting future trends, one must differentiate between constant and dynamic factors.

The population problem that confronts many Arab countries will continue and will have an increasing impact on national policy formulations. The difficulty is in predicting whether this development will affect the peace process positively or negatively.

Some will choose to see the peace process as a secondary priority, concentrating on demographic pressures instead. Others will push for an accelerated solution and concentrate on the population problem afterwards.

On the Israeli side, it is easy to predict that the government will come under pressure to accelerate Jewish immigration and settlement in the West Bank rather than inside the Green Line. Jerusalem and its surrounding areas will see an intensification of existing settlements by the addition of more settlers, and there will be continuous efforts to create new settlements. The settlement policy will be pursued directly by the Israeli government and indirectly by the different parties to the government coalition. These parties are committed to a settlement policy specific than what Mr Netanyahu is willing to publicly acknowledge.

The key challenge in the short-term is comprehending what options Netanyahu will settle for. The Arab public is being mystified by the contrasting images of the new prime minister. Is he a raving extremist who will erode all the pillars of the peace process, or is he a pragmatist attempting to ease out of catch-all rhetoric made by repeating in every Arab capital that he will uphold the peace process? Netanyahu concentrates on a different constituency than either Rabin or Peres. His support is based on satisfying the economic aspirations of those sectors among the Israeli public who are more concerned

with their share of growing Israeli prosperity than with the expansion of peace.

The personal security of Israelis, shattered by the suicide bombings earlier this year, was used by the Israeli prime minister and the Likud to convince a majority of Israelis that the increased insecurity of individual Israelis is due to the Oslo Agreements. They portrayed the peace process as a threat to the security of Israeli citizens, at a time when Israel enjoys a quantitative and qualitative military advantage over the Arabs and exercises hegemonic control over the Palestinians.

Likud translated the complex relationship between peace and security into a formula that views the peace process as detrimental to Israeli security. Even Henry Kissinger swallowed the bait when he argued in a recent *Washington Post* article that security should be interpreted to mean the individual security of Israelis rather than its original meaning — the security of the state of Israel and of the Arab states. He suggested a trade-off, in which the Arabs "take account of the concern of the Israelis for personal security and not only strategic security."

The problematic inherent in this equation is that neither the Arabs nor the Israelis can guarantee "personal security" for their citizens. Only by ceding the occupation can a better climate be created to achieve such security. If Israel increases its settlement activities, it will be nourishing a climate that induces extremism. There is a definite contradiction in the Israeli government's new policy orientation; its policies are likely to produce an outcome contrary to the security objective it claims.

The future depends on how we read the new Israeli prime minister. Demystifying Netanyahu, which is possible if we understand his working priorities, is the single most important challenge we face. The new leadership and its constituency have shifted their focus from the politics of peace to Israeli economic growth. This leadership aims not only to govern for four years, but also to achieve another victory after it completes its term in office by scoring on the economic front. Israeli leaders argue that the tremendous improvement in Israeli GNP — expected to reach \$17,000 per capita this year — is not related to the dividends of the peace process, which Israel attained as a result of renewed international acceptance. By dismissing this linkage, the *New York Times* Thomas Friedman suggests, Netanyahu's policy will be to pursue his domestic economic programme while avoiding any action that will derail the peace process, simultaneously avoiding anything that could advance it — and therefore cause a split in his coalition.

The prime minister must struggle to hold together a very difficult coalition; he faces the problem of domesticating it, if it is to agree with his policy choices rather than blasting them. Even with the newly acquired powers the prime minister has attained, this is still a daunting task. The young, dynamic Netanyahu, representing a new generation of Israeli leadership, must develop his own political persona; he can emulate neither the rigid Shamir nor the visionary Peres. He must work out his own political status; he would certainly like to go down in history as a great leader of Israel and of Zionism. A policy of polarity will not fulfil this aspiration for him.

The following scenarios, however, involve more general predictions. I call the first the "status quo scenario". In this scenario, as its name indicates, inertia becomes dominant. Regardless of the different rhetorical stands the parties might take to express advocacy, justification, opposition, or frustration, they will stay structurally in the same position. Little changes will only lead to movement in place. Time will not produce major changes; it will only result in a period of push-and-pull in which no major breakthroughs occur. It is a scenario of time wasted and opportunities lost.

There is, however, a faint hope in this scenario that the vicissitudes of the peace process will make the parties gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of peace and discard their policies of deflection and avoidance; each side may thus broaden the support base for peace and prepare the ground for future progress.

The second possibility is the "erosion scenario," in which the failure to tackle difficult dilemmas in a substantive way, coupled with a failure to adopt tactics that would ease tensions resulting from attempts to buy time while avoiding solutions and compromises, leads to the erosion of the hopeful climate that existed after Oslo and the Jordanian-Israel peace treaty, and that highlighted the possibility of dynamic progress towards a mutually acceptable compromise. A state of anticipation and euphoria would end in severe disappointment, resulting in a sense of collective despair, which could easily become the breeding ground for gloom-and-doom politics. These conditions might push the area, particularly the occupied Palestinian territories, into a state of active resistance and the rejection of peace. Whether this resistance occurs piecemeal or collectively, a new type of intifada might emerge.

Similar incidents might occur, independently or currently, if Israel attempts to engage Syrian forces in Lebanon in a military duel. The outcome of these opera-

tions might be confined to limited yet dramatic flare-ups, or could develop into a more prolonged battle of attrition; either way, the status quo that currently prevails will be eroded, and the peace momentum will be lost — at least temporarily.

Some of Netanyahu's advisors discount the possibility of another intifada, arguing that Palestinian frustration would be more likely to erupt against Arafat and the Palestinian Authority than against Israel. They also suggest that the new policy of lifting the closure will offer better economic conditions for the mass of Palestinians, thus dissuading them from pursuing anti-Israeli activities. This argument is shored up by assertions that Syria is too isolated to face Israel militarily, and that the basic Syrian reaction will be limited to heated verbiage and more Hezbollah attacks.

The third scenario is that of "reluctant progress." According to this option, Netanyahu ultimately adopts a pragmatic policy with some improvements along the various bilateral tracks, without reaching any conclusions on the basic issues. This would occur regardless of any ideological differences between the parties, which tend to grow increasingly sharp and strident according to the tenor of Netanyahu's rhetoric. Small, pragmatic steps might produce a new climate of practical interests clear to all sides, and create an incentive to continue the process despite differences regarding its frames of reference. All parties will find that it is not to their interest to escalate tension; instead, they will attempt to work out limited steps that will maintain the status quo, but will offer enough inducements and rewards to continue an inconclusive and pragmatic approach to the conflict for a number of years. New priorities might emerge, new coalitions develop, and limited progress be achieved. Incremental tactical improvements characterise this scenario, and a pragmatic policy could work as a safety net that would preclude both the disintegration of the status quo, and its mummified maintenance.

A sustainable peace will have to await a different time, with different players and different perceptions. I am no Cassandra, but I do not believe that policies of state-to-state wars are in the offing. I expect fluctuations of political tension and psychological instability, but peace — at least in the sense of no interstate wars — has been well established. One task remains: to establish a positive policy that encourages mutual acceptance and cooperative developments among the peoples of the Middle East.

*The writer is senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace.*

**Out of the 'Arab predicament'**

Gai Al-Amin has asked: "Do the Arabs have a future?" On the battlefield, replies Archie Mafeje, dreams can become part of reality

In *Al-Ahram Weekly* (25-31 July) I happened to see a bold title: "Do the Arabs have a future?" What an intriguing — or insane — question, I thought, depending on what was meant by it. Was it even more intriguing when I discovered that the author of the article was Dr Gai Al-Amin — an old friend, fellow-traveller, and a colleague from the American University in Cairo, where our paths often crossed. Therefore, I had less cause to be surprised, as Dr Gai Al-Amin is known to be a bold and daring intellectual — something for which I admire him greatly. Nonetheless, bold and daring people can often get away with murder due to the sheer force of their personalities and the actual or apparent novelty of their ideas. Although I am not in the habit of making public comments on the affairs of the Middle East, precisely because I do not know enough about the region, this time I felt that even an amateur such as me could challenge some of Dr Al-Amin's assertions and prepositions, which might be nothing else but a cry of pain.

First, it is historically questionable that Arabs have suffered "humiliation for centuries". Such an unqualified time-perspective does not tell us much, especially that in his text he refers only to the last 200 years. This could hardly account for the rise of Islamic civilization and Arab expansion along both sides of the Mediterranean all the way to the shores of the Atlantic, and southwards along the eastern coast of Africa, if the reference point for the humiliation of the Arabs is the rise of Western civilization and colonialism. The Arabs share this with other ex-colonial countries but it does not mark the beginning or the end of the history of the colonised peoples. In contrast, Dr Al-Amin makes it appear that stagnation and decline have characterised Arab history since time immemorial. He is so convinced about this original sin that he dares to suggest that Mohammed Ali's "Arab Awakening" from 1820-40 and Nasser's revolution of 1952-67 (he does not refer to the 1919 Revolution and the defiant spirit of the 1940s) should be looked upon as interludes in a continuous story of damnation. Not only is this historiographically questionable, it cannot but be a source of the deep pessimism which happens to pervade Dr Al-Amin's discourse. This is epitomised by the astounding question: "Do the Arabs have a future?"

But then, Dr Al-Amin recognises the apparent absurdity

of this question, for elsewhere in his presentation he grants that, like any Third World country or Russia after the collapse of its empire, the Arabs do have a future insomuch as they are capable of achieving "rapid economic progress". This is an article of faith which would be difficult to deny or to clarify since economic progress does not occur in a social vacuum. In fact, it presupposes the existence of a vibrant and innovative society — a virtue which according to him Arabs have long since lost. To reconcile the postulated social malaise and psychological collapse among the Arabs with the affirmation that, like anybody else they are capable of rapid economic development, Dr Al-Amin shifts his argument disconcertingly from a historical to a moral plane, by transposing his original question to a different one: "Can the Arabs develop their economies without reproducing the same ugly, crowded and polluted cities, the same consumer culture, the same..." etc. This question is probably inconsequential because all the social ills he is referring to are already very much in evidence everywhere in the Third World, without the benefit of economic development (not far from home, Cairo is a living example of this). Whether we like it or not, it is obvious that under the present circumstances underdeveloped countries would be happy to achieve economic development of any kind. But this has proved an elusive goal for most of them while poverty, pollution, and consumerism among their elites has continued unabated.

It would seem, therefore, before we can even raise the question of post-industrialisation which is not a matter for single peoples or regions, we should explain why for example Arabs have not attained industrialism, despite their early start and some significant initiatives in modern history in a country such as Egypt, which Dr Al-Amin tends to use (perhaps rightly so) as an index of "Arab nationalism". Not surprisingly, even on this score Dr Al-Amin, the free-floating signifier, social philosopher and moralist, is not to be out-done. Indeed, he declares that: "One idea which should be quickly dispensed with is that any worthwhile reform may be achieved within the present political framework. The truth is that no amount of 'Arab summits', agreements or conferences which declare their aim to be finding a way out of the present Arab predicament could really be a step towards a solution. They are themselves symptoms of this predicament." Stirring words! But this is an indictment,

without redress. What is the present political framework and what is the alternative? It may be asked. Having entered the political arena, once again Dr Al-Amin exits through the back door by treating the matter as basically a problem of intellectual praxis. He accordingly castigates those Arab intellectuals who, like Dr Faustus, have sold their souls to the devil for the sake of immediate personal benefits and rationalised their moral depravity by pointing to the inevitability of the triumph of Western imperialism and Zionism. Nor is he enamoured of those Arab intellectuals whom he calls "dreamers", who seem to cling to the past and outmoded ideas. In concrete terms it is not clear what Dr Al-Amin holds against intellectual dreamers, because he might be one himself.

The belief that Arabs are capable of recapturing some of their past revolutionary nationalism and militancy is not unjustified. What the prospects are in the present epoch is a question which is perhaps worth dreaming about day and night, for that is how utopias are produced — a vision of a new world full of promise and hope. While such dreams may be dismissed as unrealistic, it is only mental projections which transcend the given which count as intellectual. Despite his reservations about "dreamers", Dr Al-Amin indirectly conveys this view when he asks contemptuously: "What remains of an intellectual if he/she bows to current trends, however powerful or inevitable these trends may seem to be?" Therefore, it can be concluded that for the intellectual, critique is of the essence — a position fiercely advocated by Edward Said during his 1993 Reith Lectures. In the circumstances we are faced with, an inevitable question is whether Dr Al-Amin's "realists" or apologists for the status quo can legitimately be regarded as intellectuals. By using the term "intellectual" indiscriminately and simultaneously dismissing both "realists" and "dreamers", Dr Al-Amin foreclosed his own chance to ponder the question, who are the Arab intellectuals, and why?

A systematic investigation of this issue would have revealed the unity of politics and intellectual praxis in the context of the national question in the Arab world and would have made less illusory some of Dr Al-Amin's unacknowledged "dreams", such as the establishment of a "psychological quarantine" for the protection of the young, revision of our system of "education", increasing the attainment of our "own cultural values" and "revival

of religious faith", without saying how, by whom, and on what social basis. In a time of crisis, these are all parts of a contested terrain and it is the role of the critical intellect to make the underlying contradictions so apparent that the struggle for a social mandate is sharply focused, and all serious contenders cannot afford not to commit themselves to one alternative or the other. This is the threshold at which even dreams become part of reality and the intelligentsia become organic intellectuals. This is particularly so if the governments themselves have, as Dr Al-Amin suggests, become part of the national predicament. Indeed, all evidence testifies to the fact that most Arab regimes are beholden to Western imperialism and that their economic, political, and military policies are subject to American veto. To what extent do most the Arabs see this as part of the national predicament? What do they themselves believe in? Can the Arab intelligentsia identify it and articulate it in such a way that it becomes the cornerstone of the national question? This does not require government permission, nor is it contingent on any agreements they might make with imperialist forces. For instance, it is apparent that the Arabs in general reject Zionism and are intensely resentful of the role of Israel in the Middle East, despite the fact that some of their governments have signed peace accords with the Israeli government. But then their hostility towards American imperialism is not so manifest and yet Israel is nothing without unqualified American support. Likewise, a number of Arab regimes would not be able to exercise as much repressive power on the demos, without covert support from the Americans whose interest is to guarantee the flow of oil from the Middle East.

Therefore, one wonders if Dr Al-Amin, by depicting the Arabs as feeble melancholic depressives and victims of endemic decline/decay, did not unwittingly detract from the national question which hinges on the role of US (Western) imperialism in the Middle East and on the collaborationist policies adopted by Arab rentier-client states since the demise of the Nasserite revolution. These are only questions and queries from an interested outsider and Dr Al-Amin might be able to show with great panache how irrelevant or otherwise they are to the "Arab predicament".

*The writer is former visiting professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the American University in Cairo.*

# Staying for the pudding

Gravity? Deny it.  
Time? Defy it.  
**David Blake**  
sits in the  
observation car



photo: Steve Soper

The festival of the winds is almost finished — and so it is almost good-bye for another year to both upstairs and down. A few more nights and this annual summer festival will be gone. The wind machine, at least in its present form, will be dismantled at the Citadel, hopefully forever. But down in the Opera House's Open Air theatre we have some left-overs from the banquet, from the rough going sonic Citadel show that was rather condescendingly billed a festival of mass culture.

The 24 August saw a run-through repeat of the finale at the Citadel. But before the last good-bye were two lesser farewells in the open space of the Opera. The Chakka group — folkloric dancers from Russia — played on 19 August. They whirled and twirled across the scene, bubbling like the washing machines of Cairo, without toil or trouble and without stop. Not a large group, they performed a limited choreography though with unceasing energy.

The dancers were very Russian — handsome, tall and live, girls and boys alike. There were some really plump types, and the strange thing was that the fatter they were the higher they jumped. Sweating and steaming, they did miraculously quick aerial turns before landing light as feathers. Heavy weights, it seems, dance lightly if they are Russian. They had arrived from their performance at the Ismailia festival without any trace of travel fatigue. They moved faster as the performance continued, filling the stage, the open-air space and night air with their energy.

Dressed as floral borders, flowers they formed first blue then white lines before whizzing off to the wings to return in scarlet and black with red boots and Cossack cloaks flying. After endless costume changes the entire group emerged for their finale dressed totally in pink. This sounds banal but was not. Russian folk in the Turkish pink, *pembe* they call it in Turkey. And there is no colour like it for subtlety. The group looked gorgeous. The plump ones grew plumper, the thin ones thinner. They whirled to a crescendo of fury, headed off stage, out into the garden where they disappeared. High-voltage Russians melting into the night.

The 22 August saw the ultimate *takhu* played to a full house. The conductor was Farouk El-Babli. Do the public ever tire of these song fests? This one brought in a huge audience that crowded even in the colonnades. The wind was merciful, allowing the songs and the singers to make a much fuller impression than anything possible at the Citadel. The songs were kindly: no passion anywhere or darkness. The first singer, Omar El-Said, a tenor built for soft effects to which the audience were

drawn, brought an ecstatic response. The next singer was Azza Nasr; she looked imposing and had a voice to match. The songs were about being forgotten by her love. She sang well, but really did not look a forgettable type. Mustafa Ahmed sang a song about shaking hands after it's all over. He looked splendid, and had a fine baritone voice. Cheery he sounded.

The last song was by May — a small name for an ample singer. Tall, beautiful, unrefined and no tricks or soliciting of her audience. She is handsome rather than pretty, with a rich resounding voice which she knows how to use. A true

performer, she kept her adoring audience at a distance.

The song was antique Umm Kalthum: *El-Atfal*. A straight-on confrontation with one of Umm Kalthum's unique offerings. Umm Kalthum used to intone a part of the poem, allowing her voice to stay poised on a cliff-edge before flying to a safe landing, much as Callas would do — much as all supreme artists can. But none of this with May. It was a song of some time ago, sung by some other lady, but May did it her way. She managed the full high fortissimo conclusion with real style. Then the ap-

plause and flowers and the spin-off of the diva life coming down to ordinary people. No repeats. She showed some pleasure at the people's enthusiasm but not a crumb more than was necessary. Stately but with humour, she left. May's OK and could go all the way.

So came a second helping of a meal begun at the windy Citadel. Nice to hear Dvorak was such a lovely, orderly, warm uncle. A strength in troubled times. Civilised and melodic, this was the image tonight, safely out of the way of the storms of the Citadel. We had the first movement of the cello concerto. The soloist, Hassan Mo'taz, played with subtlety and warmth, clear and golden. He even paused in the long quiet sections for sheer pleasure. And we were allowed to go aloft into the celestial Dvorakian areas intended. The first movement only, but a chilly indictment of the musical inadequacies of the Citadel as a performance space.

Final piece, 24 August, Beethoven's *Fantasy for Piano*. This piece is a long, jubilant affair, full of the spirit of *Fidelio* and the 9th Symphony. Dazzling, almost collegiate, music. The piece shows off the piano and this pianist, Pascalle Rosier, did well as to tempo — often sharply furious, covering big areas of virtuoso writing. She was always there on the dot. But what was lacking was the tone, which was too often thin and superficial. What is needed is firm, deep Beethoven song. This was missing. But she sounded noble. The chorus did well and the soloists particularly so — George Wannin, tenor, Reda El-Babli, bass, Awatef El-Sharkawi, mezzo-soprano, and soprano Nevin Allouba kept the vocal line resolutely on the heights.

Next came the traditional songs orchestrated by Mustafa Nagui. Nothing critical needed, they were just enjoyment. *Travels with Someone's Uncle*, 1926, before the big crash. Complete musical visuals. Back to the same old palm trees and death on the Nile? Not quite — we go instead into something more stylish — but why is it that the traditions of colonialism die hardest in music? This is super Thomas Cook Wag-

on Lit. The first song took us into an observation car that never existed. Refreshment? Peché Melba, caviar and champagne as the world went by. Which world was never revealed, but it might be riveting, or could be the old Meni House drawing room. The tarboosh is worn. Great ladies go about rocking of Chanel and villas at Monaco. This is no film story, it is music. Too rapid for scenarios. Something rhumba begins. It all slips away from us. A very practical dream. Someone will have to pay the bill, but out Mustafa Nagui who wrote the elegant, irresistible music.

## Listings

### EXHIBITIONS

**Group Show**  
*Mashrikya Gallery*, 8 Cham-poli St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 10am-3pm. Show featuring the works of artists who have exhibited at the gallery over the past six years, including Adel El-Sirwi, Fathi Hassan, Ibrahim El-Haddad and Gamal Abdell-Nasser.

**The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil**  
1 Kofayr El-Abtah St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-4pm. A gangster film from director Martin Scorsese. With Sharon Stone and Robert DeNiro.

**Nasser '56**  
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Tel 02 0254. Daily 12.30, 3.30pm & 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Tel 250 0254. Thursday & Saturday midnight show. El-Baraa' El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Faten Hamama, Manial El-Rodha. Tel 364 9767. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. With Nadia El-Guindi.

**Greek folkloric dance**  
Open Air Theatre, Opera House grounds, Giza. Tel 342 0398. 29 August, 9pm. Final Can performance for the summer.

**THEATRE**

**El-Sitt Hoda**  
Sayed Darwish Theatre, Alex-  
andria. Tel 482 5602, 4825106.

**The National Theatre**, pro-

duction transfers to Alexandria

for the summer.

**Brothers Rascals**

**El-Ahd Theatre**, Alexandria. Tel 596 0144.

**Ballo (Fanfare)**

**Medinet Nasr Theatre**, Youssouf

Abbas St, Medinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm.

**Starling El-Sadani** and de-

vised by Samia El-Afandi.

**Zambalila El-Maktaba** (Mu-labalooh at the Station)

**Floating Theatre**, Tel 364 9516. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.

**El-Ganzir (The Chain)**

**El-Salem Theatre**, Qasr El-

Aini. Tel 355 2484. Daily 8pm.

**Mess' El-Kheir Tam**, Ya-

meen (Good Evening Egypt,

Again)

**Mohamed Farid Theatre**, Ben-

zeddin. Tel 770 603. Daily ex-

Tues, 9.30pm.

**El-Zaim (The Leader)**

**El-Baraa' Theatre**, Pyramids

Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily

exc Tues, 9.30pm.

Directed by Sherif Afifi, star-

ring Adel Imam.

**Dastoor Checks In**

**El-Salem**, 65 Abd-el-Hamid Ba-

dawi St, Helipolis. Tel 293 1073.

Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

And Thurs midnight show. Radio

24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

A com art checks into a hotel to

pull some scams. His accomplice,

Dunston the orangutan, has ideas of his own.

**Fair Game**

**Karim II**, 15 Emadeddin St, Down-town. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

She's a woman with a secret

Directed by, and star-

ring, Mohamed Soh-

hi.

**Bahlool El-Istanbul**

(Bahlool in Istanbul)

**Ramiss Hilton Theatre**, Qasr El-

Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Daily

10pm, Mon 8pm.

Directed by, and star-

ring, Mohamed Soh-

hi.

**Hazzozni Ya**

**El-Giza** (Theatre)

**Abdel-Aziz Al-Saeed**

**Marital**, Tel 364 4160. Daily

Fri & Sun, 8.30pm.

Starring Hifi Abdu, directed by Samia El-

Afouri.

**Museum of Modern Egyptian Art**

**Qasr El-Nil Theatre**, Qasr El-

Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Daily

10pm, Mon 8pm.

Directed by, and star-

ring, Mohamed Soh-

hi.

**El-Gamilia** (We-

Webskin (The Bear

and the Ugly)

**Zamelk Theatre**, 13 Shargia

El-Dorr St, Zamalek. Tel 341

0660. Daily exc Wed, 10pm.

Lella Eloua is the beauty and

everyone else as the ugly. Di-

rected by Hussien Kamal.

**Nick of Time**

**Metro**, 35 Talaat Harb St, Down-town. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

With Johnny Depp.

**The Net**

**El-Horreya I**, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Helipolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Ramiss Hilton St, Tel 7436. 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & midnight.

Shim Nakahara's award-winning

1990 screen adaptation of Chekhov's play, revealing the cruel

differences between life as pre-

sented to young girls and life as it

really is. Subtitle in Arabic.

**Musawwir Muktahar**

**Museum**

**Tahrir St, Giza**.

Daily exc Sun and

Mon, 9am-1.30pm.

A permanent collec-

tion of works by the

sculptor Muktahar

Muktahar (d. 1934), whose granite monu-

ment to Saad Zaghloul stands

near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and

whose Egypt Awakening became,

somewhat belatedly, an icon of post-revolutionary Egypt.

**FILMS**

**Japanese Cultural Centre**, 106

Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City.

**The Cherry Orchard**, 29 August,

6pm.

Shim Nakahara's award-winning

1990 screen adaptation of Chekhov's

play, revealing the cruel

differences between life as

# A little home cooking

**Nehad Selahha**  
makes the rounds of  
the Egyptian thea-  
tres to see what is  
cooking for the Cairo  
International Festival  
of Experimental  
Theatre.

With only a few days to go until the opening of CIET, the issue of the Egyptian entry into the international competition is still to be settled. The selection committee faces a lighter task than in previous years, with only five productions to choose from. One reason for this is that the state-theatre sector has been working at less than its usual steam this year. The head of the sector, Sami Kheshaba, seems to be exercising the virtue of economy, unlike his predecessor, Sayed Radi, who pealed us last year with no less than 13 shows — half-baked and hastily concocted for the occasion — Kheshaba has only three shows to offer the selection committee. In comparison, El-Hamiger Centre has no less than six, four of them completely new, with two still in the final rehearsal stage. The Opera House, predictably, trotted out Walid Aoum's dance-theatre piece on the lift of Tabeya Halim, *The Last Interview*, and the Cultural Palace Organisation has offered a production of Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule*.

A refreshing newcomer to the arena this year is the Cultural Development Fund (CDF) which is sponsoring two productions which will play during the festival. It has been suggested that one of them — the Rebellion Theatre's *Kaspar* (based on Peter Handke's famous play and shown last year) — be seen by the Festival selection committee. *Kaspar* was originally sponsored by the Goethe Institute. For its current run, Rebellion applied to CDF, which also paid for the show's trip to Italy where it was invited to the Mediterranean Festival in Bari. If all goes well and no further hitch occurs, they will be seen by the selection committee today, at the final hour.

The other Cultural Development Fund production by El-Ma'bad [The Temple] theatre company is based on three texts, all dealing with the story of Oedipus: Jean Cocteau's *La Machine Infernale*, Sophie's *Oedipus Rex* and Ali-Salem's *You Killed the Beast*. Other material is also interwoven, such as extracts from Jean Cocteau's *Prometheus Bound*, and choruses from various other Greek plays. Apart from the innovative text, the show, entitled *Oedipus the Leader*, promises a very exciting scenography, with video projections of old films and specially filmed footage of the actors, including a scene where Oedipus machine-guns *Lara* down after a dispute as to whose Mercedes has the right of way. In addition, there is a specially constructed catwalk that divides the stage in two. Theatrical legerdemain; and a crucified Prometheus suffering patiently in the balcony. Ahmed El-Amri's actions are exceptionally sensitive and well-trained; the majority of them were trained in theatre either at the AUC or abroad. This made it possible for Aitier, the director, to present the show in three different languages: Arabic, French and English. When I watched a rehearsal of *Oedipus the Leader*, I thought it stood a very good chance of making an impression on the international jury chosen to represent Egypt at the contest. Unfortunately, however, the troupe applied for funding rather late with the result that the show will not be ready before the committee's deadline. Still, audiences can get the chance to see the show at the Wallace from 1-7 September; the theatre has provided free in a generous gesture from the AUC to its students and alumni who are members of El-Ma'bad.

Al-Hamiger's contribution to the festival this year is, as usual, young and amateur. Three productions have already been seen by the public: *Mannegiq Desertscape II*, and *Joseph the Tiger*, of which *Mannegiq* was nominated for viewing by the selection committee. Unfortunately, director Hana Abdel-Fattah took the unwise step of axing the whole of the second act in the interests of brevity. It was a case of cutting off his nose to spite his face; without the second part, in which a shopwindow dummy invades the world of humans, creating many hilarious situations, side-splitting misunderstandings and generally wreaking havoc as he goes in his merry way, the show lost most of its verve, energy and humour.

Al-Hamiger would have done much better to choose Elif Yehya's flamboyant and frothy satire on life in Egypt today. *Desertscape II* is based on Alastair Cordner's play *Lamarr*, translated and adapted by Ahmed Ismail with the director. The original was severely cut down, modified and Egyptianised, and infused with poems by Salah Iahia and Elias Abu Mady, extracts from Edna O'Brien's *Virginia*, Bobo Strauss's *The Time and the Room*, old Egyptian songs and many barbed satirical parodies of politicians, preachers and popular entertainers. Structurally it resembles boxes within boxes, with each story generating a new one. It begins with the creation of the world, where two spirits representing art and music (one spirit wears a hat with the handle of a lute sticking out from it, the other a headgear topped with a palette) introduce light and sound into



Karin El-Tounsi's *El-Kadwa*: Will it be the Egyptian competition entry?

the world at the instructions of a mysterious 'creator'. It proceeds to present an image of a doomed society of political charlatans, frustrated lovers, oppressed artists, drug addicts and lost souls — all riddled with skin cancer to boot — and ends with the appearance of the mysterious creator/author, a 'la Pirandello in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*', who goes on to write the disastrous final scene. All are doomed to die because they are failures, and he prophesies an earthquake that will wipe the country off the map amid the hysterical shrieking and wailing of some characters and the ludicrous posturisations and deluded ramblings of others. It was a forceful, impressive scene and was followed by the author calling for a blackout. The lights came up on the cast standing in line to take their bows, and suddenly they all jump into a gaping hole in the stage, created specially by the director, and used throughout the play for some of its most exciting and original effects. Only the author remains on stage, with the political charlatan, the eternal winner, whereupon they walk off arm-in-arm.

Elif Yehya has a flair for visual effects, achieved with the simplest possible means. As in her previous *Desertscape I* (based on Cyril Churchill's *Top Girls*), the set consists simply of lengths of material hung and shaped to represent sand dunes, and two traditional Egyptian headbands. She depended on her cast, costumes, lighting, masks and human-sized puppets to inject colour and variety into her scenes. Her cast was more than competent; their enthusiasm and solid acting techniques were largely responsible for the artistic energy, biting relevance, and sense of urgency that run through *Desertscape II*. The malaise which infected the lives of the five women representing the history of female oppression in *Desertscape I* has here spread to the whole society, achieving the proportions of an existential plague.

While *Joseph the Tiger*, adapted from a German text by director Ashraf Farouq, may not compare favourably with Yehya's production, and seems cluttered and simplistic in its overall conception, Al-Hamiger is expected to produce two more shows which come up to the centre's usual standard of artistic excellence. After six years as lead dancer with the Cam Opera Dance Theatre troupe, currently under the direction of Walid Aoum, Karin El-Tounsi has decided to venture into the world of choreography and designed a dance-theatre piece about a group of young men and women searching for spiritual fulfilment and inner peace. In *El-Kadwa* (which means confinement but carries the religious sense of divine blessing), folklore is roped in, especially rituals of exorcism, initiation rites, and whirling dervishes' dances. The soundtrack is a musical collage derived from the works of Egyptian composers and folk tunes.

Hani Abdel-Matmid's *El-Mukarrif* (The Clown) uses circus-clown antics and routines, mime and masks, to offer a new, up-dated version of this classical text by the Syrian playwright Mohamed El-Maghout. Hopefully, it, together with the other plays, will be on show during the festival, and I earnestly advise you to pay a few visits to Al-Hamiger during the festival.

Walid Aoum's *The Last Meeting* was extensively covered on this page when it was first performed this year, and it will undoubtedly be a strong candidate. Its technical polish is unmatched in any production currently on offer.

The question of technical polish is an ever-present bugaboo for Egyptian theatre directors. Indeed, the two other candidates for the production representing Egypt — *The Symphony of Lear*, directed by Iman Abdelfattah at Al-Ghad Theatre, and *El-Ma'bad* (The Temple), adapted by Samih Mahran from Yehya El-Tahir Abdalla's novel *The Collar and the Bracelet* at El-Tali'a Theatre — have great potential except for some rough edges and lack of attention to details. Abdelfattah's *Lear* boldly splits Shakespeare's play down the middle, removing the Gloucester/Edmund/Edgar subplot, stripping it down to its original folktale bones, and reducing the play to a straightforward story about a poor old father betrayed by his two eldest daughters and achieving wisdom in the end. The potential for sentimentality in such a treatment was mitigated by the musical conception of the whole show and its subtle evocation of the Renaissance Masque — fast ornate, elaborate theatrical form which reached its height in the English Court at the hands of Ben Jonson and the Italian designer Inigo Jones in the early 17th century.

Even for those who have not read the original novel, the story is easy enough to grasp; it revolves round the themes of sexual impotence, the oppressive, vicious life cycle of women in backward societies, and the destructive influence of tradition.

The three forces that oppress the heroine are the religious order, represented by the holy man, the patriarchal order, represented by the sick father and absent brother, and male sexual exploitation, represented by her husband. Ironically, and quite predictably, all three forces turn out to be impotent; nevertheless, they conspire to destroy her. The high point of the show is her visit to the temple which reminds us of Yehya's visit to the mountains in Lorca's play. Like Samih Mahran's former play, *Child of Sand*, also an adaptation of a novel, this production qualifies as a feminist play par excellence. The director did well to use young, enthusiastic actors, deploy his cast all around the hall on smaller stages and use live folk singers and musicians. The acting was generally competent and the actors did their best to reproduce the rhythms and intonations of the speech of that part of Upper Egypt where the novel is set; if they slipped sometimes the script helped us to forget it and carried them along with its sensuous poetic language and rich rhythms. The choice of costume was particularly happy; so was the inclusion of a Nubian singer who enacted parts of local erotic songs. But for a naive scene where a statue from the temple descends dutifully from his niche, complete with clouds of fire and smoke, to impregnate the heroine, as specified in legend, and the conclusion of the original script's incestuous romance, the show would have given an overpowering impression of Egyptian authenticity.

One cannot honestly say that the selection committee has its hands full; with only five shows — maybe six; the manager of Al-Salam Theatre has suddenly, at the time of writing, informed me of his decision to jump in with a production called *El-Ghagari* (The Gypsy) — they will not have to spend hours tolerating (and de-liberating over) endlessly boring shows. The difficulty is that most offerings are more or less equal in technical, intellectual and artistic merit — and there's the rub.

## Plain Talk

Regularly I return to the poetry of W B Yeats, opening the well-thumbed pages to re-read my favourite poems. It was through Yeats' poetry that I first became interested in the Irish Twilight movement and via Yeats' that I was introduced to the plays of Lady Gregory and Synge and to the fiction of Sean O'Faolain. Indeed, such was my Irishmania that during the 40s I translated *Riders to the Sea* into Arabic for Radio Cairo.

This period of Irish history has always fascinated me, and one of the best ways for anyone unfamiliar with the period to get to know its leading characters is through the biographies of Frank O'Connor. One such biography, *The Big Fellow*, deals with the life of the Irish nationalist Michael Collins, from his birth on a farm in West Cork in 1890 to his tragically early death at the hands of his former colleagues in the nationalist movement, in 1922.

Michael Collins, a man whose name, for complicated reasons, was all but erased from history, has, it seems, been rediscovered, as I was delighted to discover when, reading the British papers, I came across a review of a new film by Neil Jordan, director of the well-received *The Crying Game*, based on his life.

The film is, apparently, causing something of a stir in both the UK and Ireland. The British seem intent on continuing to view Collins as a terrorist while the Irish insist that he was no more than a traitor.

Yet to write off the film as "an IRA one", which is what the director thinks is happening in England, is just plain inaccurate. As Jordan says: "To call Michael Collins an IRA film is contemptible. Some of Yeats' poetry covered the same period. Is it known to be called IRA poetry?"

Jordan is perfectly right. And indeed, *Easter 1916*, with which Yeats opens a sequence of poems dealing with the period, is one of my favourites.

The poem was written on 25 September 1916, just a few days after the infamous events it describes, events that, as Yeats famously stated, changed the situation utterly, events out of which "a terrible beauty was born".

Collins was to some a freedom fighter, to others a terrorist. Such is the fate of the members of nationalist movements the world over. It all, of course, depends on whose side you are on. But what makes Collins something of a unique figure, however, is that while he was prepared to fight against overwhelming odds — ie the British — he was also prepared, and more importantly, psychologically capable, of searching for a peaceful resolution to the problems of Ireland.

This column is neither the place — nor the space — to go into the history of the Irish Nationalist movement. It is perhaps enough to record Collins' own words upon signing the peace treaty he had negotiated. Then, he said: "I have just signed my own death warrant."

And how right he was.

"The power of Collins myth," writes the reviewer of Jordan's film, "is not what he did — though he was a legend in his time — but what he might have done if he lived. The tragedy is that bombs might not be going off in London if he had."

O'Connor ends his biography of Collins with a sentence I have always found inexplicably moving:

"It seemed as if life could never be the same again. The greatest oak in the forest had crashed and it seemed it must destroy all life in its fall."

Mursi Saad El-Din



UK entry *Rainbow Ice*, performed by Perpetual Motion; Singapore's *Descendants of the Eunuch*; Egypt's *Kaspar*, performed by Rebellion Theatre

A second Ukrainian show, taking the famously complicated love life of Egypt's most famous queen as a starting point. Exploring the complicated marriage à trois of Cleopatra, Antony and Caesar, the Ukrainian group explores the implications of love and power politics through the surrealistic dreams of a contemporary couple whose money which is occupied by the Palestinian queen and her mother.

Women to Love by Yevgeny Svetlov, State Youth Theatre, Belgorod, dir M. Dushkinov.

One scene, one actress, and of course, the by now legendary film star Marilyn Monroe. Combining documentary material about her death, drawn mostly from Romy's *The Tragedy of a Star is Born*, with an imagination of the events leading up to Monroe's death, the play is yet one more testament to the iconic appeal of

the ultimate fifties sex symbol.

A Modern Woman, Akademi Seni Pertunjukan, Malaysia

Mixing the conventions of Western and Asian theatre in the construction of a homosocial narrative, this Malaysian troupe attempt to articulate the dilemmas faced by a working class woman who is a member of a society whose modernising programme, more often described as an economic miracle, can have disturbing and de-humanising results.

The Gathering of the Clan, Aborigines — National Theatre of Ghana, dir Ony Keng See

Described in its publicity as "an experiment in West African

Folk Theatre, the production mixes dialogue, story-telling, music and dance in an arresting, dynamic scenario typifying the experiences of a West African community".

Descendants of the Eunach Admiral, Theatre Works Ltd, Singapore, dir Ony Keng See

Ancient Chinese court practices and the career of the cunning Admiral Cheng Ho, responsible for China's most costly maritime adventure in the 15th century, a sound track that includes both Merlefest Monk and Faure and a backdrop of projected computer graphics combine to draw parallels between today's office politics and the ancient Chinese custom of castration.

Alma, mis Voluntarias e Futebolistas

Associazione Culturale Stampa Alternativa, Italy, dir Marco Chiaravalloti

Adapted from *Eight Souls Inside a Bomb (Almost Exploding)*, written in 1919 by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, inventor and leading propagandist of Futurism, the Italian army — which translates as "Oh my soul, so volunteers and fascist" — is a one-man show performed by Antonio Vito Maggi.

Mitglieder der Freiheit, Germany, dir Andreas Poppe

Adapted by the group from *A Midsummer's Night Dream* Bottom Technical University of Lisbon Theatre Group, Portugal, dir Jorge Lisboa

At once a portrait of Gennaro occupied Serbia and a picture of life in contemporary Sarajevo, the Portuguese entry examines the strengthened policies retires over artistic expression.

Live Acts of Love, Ab No Es Ensemble, US, dir Jeni Johnson and Lauren Wilson

Co-written and directed by two ensemble members, *Live Acts of Love* is an all-women show which places the same five characters in two very different situations.

Threes, Edita Brzoz Compania, Austria, dir Edita Brzoz

Tonia, the fiery queen of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, is shown as a portrayal of Elizabeth I. In the same Austrian production another Elizabeth, Austro-Hungarian empress, is associated with Shakespeare's character, in a performance that bills itself as "a portrait in movement".

**Neglected and forgotten, home to the greatest level of poverty, the highest unemployment and the fewest services in the country, Upper Egypt stands at the brink of despair. The decline of militant Islamist violence during the past two years is no cause for complacency. Egypt can no longer afford to forget its south. President Mubarak has declared the coming two decades the "decades of developing the south". LE100 billion are to be spent on development in Upper Egypt. In this, and three subsequent issues, Al-Ahram Weekly takes an in-depth look at Upper Egypt, uncovering the roots of "deadly despair" and tracing the efforts and the will to generate a new hope.**



photo: Jihan Ammar

# The south recalled

## Making the future into a site of hope

In Upper Egypt, development means survival. Omayma Abdel-Latif finds out why

For 29-year-old Hassan Harbi, a resident of Al-Nawawa village in Assiut, the worst days are to be over. Recently Harbi managed to find a LE200 (approx. \$60) per month job with a community development project and he will soon lose his long-held status as unemployed.

Although his newfound employment has ushered in some feelings of relief, Harbi still wishes he could find something more suited to his education. "Without hope for the future, hard work at a low-paying job makes no sense," he says.

In 1990, Harbi graduated from Assiut University's Faculty of Engineering. Since then, he has tried everything to find work.

"I used to queue up with dozens of other people at the gates of a sugar factory to look for work. I was feeling very stressed because I had a family to feed and finding a job is not an easy thing in a village like ours," Harbi recalled.

Now, the engineer says he has given up sifting through the daily newspapers' classified section — a ritual he has performed since graduation — and resigned himself to the fact that employment opportunities for civil engineers in Upper Egypt are in extremely short supply, if they exist at all.

Harbi's simmering discontent is shared with about six million Egyptians who are branded as "ultra poor" — their incomes are lower than a third of the national average and many live on a quarter of a dollar a day or less, according to research conducted by Marcelo Giugale, World Bank senior economist, and Hamed Mubarak, secretary of Egypt's Private Sector Development Committee.

Although 40 per cent of the ultra poor live in Upper Egypt, development schemes have been slow to reach the region. Giugale and Mubarak found that the poor in Upper Egypt are characterised by larger and younger households with a high incidence of disability and malnutrition as well as high morbidity and mortality rates. In many parts of the governorates of Assiut, Sohag, and Qena, there is little or no access to safe drinking water.

With an annual per capita income averaging \$330 a year, adult illiteracy rates hovering around 62 per cent and soaring unemployment rates, Upper Egyptians are losing hope for the future.

"The deadliest disease is despair. Poverty is only a symptom," asserts Mohamed Abul-Isaad, history professor at Minya University. "The lack of any governmental attention to development has created a vast new underclass which has no stake in the society or the government," he explains.

In recent years, these poverty pockets have become a breeding ground for the resurgence of militant groups which challenged the government and claimed Islam is the only solution. The government's slowness in implementing development projects in the south has heightened the attraction of radical Islam and exacerbated an increasingly vengeful conflict between security forces and militant groups.

"There has been a protest against the status quo," says Abul-Isaad.

And, he added, since "the government could not tackle the problem at its source, it reacted by cracking down on extremism."

But it is obvious, according to Hisham Gad El-Moula, a resident of Abu Qurqas in Minya Governorate, that the terrorism and violence in the south need more than just security measures — a fact that the government has only realised four years after the violence first began.

In an attempt to alleviate some of the area's economic and social woes and to put an end to the daily dose of bloodshed, the government has mapped out a national sustainable development programme for Upper Egypt spanning the next 22 years. Included are the southern parts of Minya, Asyut, Sohag, Qena, Aswan, El-Wadi El-Gedid and the Red Sea Governorate. The plan will serve 10 million Upper Egyptians who represent 17.2 per cent of the country's total population.

Just one year ago, President Hosni Mubarak declared the coming two decades as the "decades of developing the south". He also announced investment incentives with free land and tax exemp-

tions to attract private sector enterprises. The government's plan will be carried out in four stages at a cost of \$60 to \$100 billion, according to Shura Council estimates from a March 1996 report. The report projects that 2.8 million job opportunities will be available while new agricultural and industrial ventures will employ another three million.

"People have been living under unbearable conditions. What has happened [the rise of militant Islam] was basically a result of the dire economic situation. This project is a remedy for decades of neglect," says Mahmoud Mahfouz, head of the Shura Council's Development Committee and architect

of the government's new development plan. Mahfouz added that the poor distribution of financial resources allocated by the government, the population explosion and the reluctance of public and private investors have all contributed to a state of stagnation and weakened the country's development momentum.

A 200-plus-page report compiled by the Shura Council and a committee of the People's Assembly on development in Upper Egypt emphasises that the development of cultural services, human resources, tourism, security, health and industry should be given top priority. The report also recommends that the project's time frame should be shortened so that re-

port on results.

Shura Council member Nabil Bebawy stresses that development in the south should focus on eradicating unemployment. For added momentum, he suggests stationing a minister in one of Upper Egypt's governorates.

"Having one minister in any of the southern governorates will help drive forward the wheel of development. Decisions will be made faster and officials will have first-hand information on the nature of problems facing the people there instead of relying on reports," Bebawy says.

One of the overall project's main goals is to attract investors to bring in capital for development. While the government will provide 25 per cent of the project's funding — in the form of six industrial complexes in the southern governorates in addition to the basic infrastructure — the private sector is expected to share the remaining 75 per cent. Approval was given to 369 new projects worth LE269 million proposed by investors, creating 166,880 job opportunities.

But according to one businessman, one possible way to encourage investors to head south is to provide them with the basics in security, communications, transportation and infrastructure.

"The case in Egypt has always been the other way around — establishing factories and projects has always come before laying down the necessary infrastructure, roads, communication, and transportation," notes Heshmat Abul-Kheir, a businessman from Sohag.

However, some expressed fears that the development process might place the south on a hamster's wheel: no matter how hard it runs, it never seems any closer to greater prosperity for the individual citizen.

"To us development means the price of bread and rice," said Gad El-Moula. "It is good to talk about plans for developing the long-forgotten south, but officials should know what people really need — sewage systems, clean water, schools and employment opportunities. We need to see that development is something that happens because of the poor and not in spite of the poor," he said.

The underdevelopment of Upper Egypt prompted satirical writer Ahmed Ragab to write, "We have to scratch our hands, like good neighbours do, in the state of Upper Egypt which is south of Cairo and belongs to the Fourth World. We have to change the concept that Upper Egypt is the exile of bad employees. If the government is taking care of the slums in the city, why doesn't it take care of the slum state south of Cairo which suffers from poverty, unemployment and terrorism?"

Hassan Shukry, history professor at the newly-inaugurated Southern Valley University in Sohag, says "If we encourage the young people to believe in the future and give them solid evidence, such as development, we will find crime, poverty and the whole range of social ills shrinking to manageable proportions."



photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

مكنا من الأصل



photo: Emile Karam

## The grapes of wrath

The confrontation between police and militants plays itself out like a traditional vendetta. Omayma Abdel-Latif looks inside the vicious circle

Three men sat next to 66-year-old Hajj Abdallah in the downtown Cairo office of the well-known Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya lawyer, Montasser El-Zayat. Hajj Abdallah was crying uncontrollably as he recounted the story of his 27-year-old son, Nasser, who is awaiting execution, having been convicted of participating in terrorist activities and attempting to murder a church guard in Aswan in 1993.

The three men next to him had good reason to empathise; they were experiencing the same ordeal of losing their sons to the ranks of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya and most likely to the long days and longer nights of prison cells.

The strife plaguing Upper Egypt reached Edfu on 12 November 1993, when gunmen opened fire on a church guard and stole his weapon. Nasser, who studied medicine at Assuit University, was caught on the scene with an automatic rifle. According to newspaper reports, Nasser had been a member of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya for the past three years without his father's knowledge.

Nasser is but one of many university graduates recruited by militant groups which established their networks throughout much of Upper Egypt during the '80s and the early '90s.

Between 1992 and 1994, the same sad scene repeatedly played itself out in Upper Egypt: towns and villages were put under a virtual siege with police forces rounding up hundreds of suspected militants, around-the-clock curfews, and a daily dose of bloody confrontation which has claimed the lives of hundreds of militants, police and civilians caught in the crossfire.

By 1995 however, Upper Egyptians were already exhausted from years of fighting and as a result, violence began to subside. Hand clamp downs on militant hideouts also led to a downturn in violence.

As compared to 1994, when 1,006 people were killed, less than 200 deaths were reported by the end of 1995. In July 1996, the number dropped further to 78.

The battle scars, however, are still very much there. And, according to many locals, there is no time to savor fragile peace. Anxiety and fear still reign in many parts of the south and the scattered incidents which occur add to people's fears.

The violence that still plagues the south is viewed by many experts on Islamist militancy as more than just a symptom of serious socio-economic malaise.

"It is an identity crisis," says Abdel-Mo'ali Shaarawi, sociology professor at Cairo University. "They do not feel they belong to the country because in the south, justice is denied, poverty is enforced, ignorance prevails and people feel that society is conspiring to oppress, rob, and degrade them, so neither person nor property will be safe," Shaarawi explains.

According to Shaarawi, the majority of Upper Egyptians feel that there is a distinct north-south divide in the country. Many believe that while the north is closer to the heart of the country's political and social life, the south is isolated. "These young men [the militants] seek revenge on a system that does not meet their basic needs," he said.

The assassination of President Anwar El-Sadat in October 1981 heralded a new chapter in militant Islamism violence in the country. It was only in the late '80s however that the militants could launch a full campaign of armed violence. "Until 1987, the second generation of both the Gama'a and Jihad groups was still in the making and this might explain why there were hardly any terrorist attacks in southern governorates during the '80s," said Hafez Abu Sa'ida, member of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (BOHR).

The militants launched what amounted to an all-out campaign of armed attacks at the end of the '80s and early '90s. The security forces struck back with great severity. Gradually, the confrontation began to take the form of a traditional vendetta battle.

If a terrorist was killed, his family which had not been involved previously, would feel bound to avenge him. And if the family does not, the Gama'a will. It is a vicious circle and the government should be partly blamed for it since they did not consider the needs of the south in their battle against terrorism," said criminologist Soad El-Sharawi.

Mohamed Eid, a member of the ruling National Democratic Party and head of the city council of Darout, a city in Assuit Governorate, is also critical of the way government bodies handled the rise of militant Islamism in Upper Egypt. He especially blamed the ministries of interior and al-waqf (Religious Endowments). In the absence of government-appointed sheikhs, he explained, extremists took over mosques and used them to propagate their seductive ideas.

"This occurred under the very eyes of the police and the preachers of the Awqaf Ministry, who ignored dozens of cables from the townpeople requesting assistance to deal with the extremists," Eid said.

The village of Sambu, close to Dairout, was literally under the control of amir al-gama'a, the local leader of the Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, he added.

Awqaf preachers interviewed by the Weekly said they did not realise the scope of the extremists' plan until Islamists began attacking Christians, tourists and civilians. But in their own turn they blamed what they alleged was excessive police force for the spiral of violence.

Human rights organisations make the same charge. For the past four years, these groups have repeatedly accused security forces of unlawfully re-

sorting to excessive force in hunting down Islamist militant suspects.

Wide scale and harsh crackdowns, mass arrests and the burning of thousands of square kilometres of sugarcane plantations — traditional terrorist hideouts — with no compensation to the farmers, have fueled further traditional feelings of mistrust that have long characterised Upper Egyptians' relations with the central government in the north.

A police officer in Abu Qurqa, in Minya Governorate, admitted that the police resorted to tough measures against the militants. "But the existence of some excesses should not colour our judgement of the police's success in the battle," he said. "Without tough measures the police in the most advanced states of the world would fail in confronting terrorism."

So far there has been no treatment of the root causes of terrorism, according to Sultan Abu Ali, former economy minister and a long-time resident of Assuit. Until this happens, he pointed out, the problem will most likely persist.

"It is very deceptive to think the battle is over. The militants are still able to carry out major operations which means they still enjoy widespread influence," he warned.

Abu Ali explained, "Corruption and terrorism are linked. The way to eradicate the remaining pockets of terrorism is for top government officials to cut down on their conspicuous consumption. They should show some respect for everyone else. They should know that the people of the south are not naive or stupid."

"The young educated men who have remained idle for years with no hope for the future are like time-bombs. Unless the security apparatus realises it is time to use a new technique, it is very difficult to predict the end of this conflict," he said.



photo: Antoine Albert



photo: Mohamed Waseem

**'Unemployment, youth and culture are three main factors related to terrorism in the south. In addition to other factors, high rates of unemployment and lack of education and services have produced terrorism. So stability and security in the south are an important part of Egypt's stability'**

Shura Council report

## An eye for an eye

Family vendettas had been claiming their toll of victims long before militant Islam came upon the scene. Sahar El-Bahr investigates

One of the less salacious aspects of living in Upper Egypt is the age-old practise of an eye for an eye. Upper Egypt is no longer that remote part of Egypt where illiteracy and superstition prevail: electricity lights up the villages and thousands of students are graduated from universities and schools annually.

Yet, the practice of vendetta remains deeply woven into the fabric of life, accounting for the highest percentage of crime. The custom is so prevalent in the region that even women and children have carried out vendettas.

"I am proud of killing him, I shall never regret it. It would have been a disgrace not to do it," boasted 12-year-old Mohamed Abdel-Azim. The boy had shot dead a 63-year-old man to avenge the murder of his father. Urged on by neighbours and relatives — aware of juvenile delinquency laws — Mohamed broke into the home of Mahmoud Hashim Nasser and shot him in the forehead with a shotgun. Nasser's son had been imprisoned for the killing of Abdel-Azim's father three months earlier.

Fawzi El-Ouenda, dean of the High Institute for Sociology, believes that the act of murdering not only the person who killed, but the head of his family, has historical roots. Eliminating the head of the household brought on the utmost damage economically and socially to the family. However, due to the high rate of intermarriage this tended to enlarge the scale of conflict to include whole villages. Family members have even been known to wait years for the opportunity to avenge loved ones;

waiting until the perpetrator has served his prison sentence or, in more extreme cases, deliberately committing a crime in order to get into the prison to fulfil the vendetta.

One of the largest vendetta tragedies in recent memory occurred last year in El-Minya. The bloodletting began after a confrontation between two rival families over the disappearance of a member of one of the families. The show down lasted five hours and left 28 persons dead and 17 injured. The massacre, though noteworthy for the high number of casualties, is just an example of dozens of vendetta cases in Upper Egypt.

Over the first five months of 1996, 44 cases were registered with the General Security Department (GSD), an authority of the Interior Ministry. GSD records show that there were 117 vendetta crimes committed in 1995 and 112 in 1994.

"There are even highly educated Upper Egyptians who seek revenge or urge other people to carry it out," said Major General Nasser Zaher, head of the GSD.

However, Zaher is quick to point out that the percentage of vendetta murders has decreased as a result of back and forth Upper Egyptian migration to urban areas where people tend to become more enlightened.

Abdel-Rehim El-Ghoul, a People's Assembly member and the head of the Sports and Youth Committee in the chamber, agrees with Zaher that the number of vendettas has decreased, attributing this to the development plans taking place in

Upper Egypt. "People began enjoying their lives as it became easier and more cultured and educated," El-Ghoul told the Weekly. "Now there is electricity, water, paved roads, modern equipment, schools, universities, newspapers, TV and radio. The people themselves have realised that the act of vendetta is a tradition they must give up."

Still many remain unsatisfied with the assumption that development in Upper Egypt will eventually lead to the disappearance of vendetta crimes.

"Whenever I go to Upper Egypt I feel that I have travelled back two centuries," said Ahmed El-Magdoub, professor at the National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Research. Vendetta, he believes, has economic, social, cultural and even political roots.

"The development taking place now is neither tangible nor sufficient. The life of Upper Egyptians is still full of problems including illiteracy, pollution, ignorance, negligence, poverty, and disease," El-Magdoub complained.

Among those who feel that there is still an enormous role to be played by the state concerning development in Upper Egypt is Ahmed Askar, professor of sociology at Sohag University. "The rate of vendettas is higher in Qena where there are only very few development projects. Another problem is that the budget allocated for education especially universities, is very low," Askar told the Weekly.

Further exacerbating the situation is the Islamist presence in Upper Egypt which has spawned the desire for peaceful living: "People are keen on keeping their educated sons alive."

"political vendetta" in which security personnel are murdered by the families of militants killed in police operations. The police recourse on occasion to different forms of collective punishment against residents of villages or urban quarters in which the militants have a strong base, has resulted in an increase in political vendettas, said Askar.

Hamdi Radwan, an Upper Egyptian physician, asserts that there are whole families who have joined the ranks of Islamist militants, not because they are convinced of their ideas but to protect and support members of their families. "After all, it is a tribal society where the individual gets his social status from that of his family," added Radwan.

The social prestige of acquiring weapons has created a situation where hardly a household is without at least one gun.

"Money, weapons and family are the elements of power. We are all used to having weapons," said Nadia Ibrahim, a housewife. El-Magdoub agrees. "The most prestigious families are the ones who have up-to-date weapons to the extent that some of them have automatic weapons."

But Askar believes that as time goes by, Upper Egyptians are realising that revenge is not the answer. He noted that before the last People's Assembly elections, the number of reported vendetta cases dropped significantly. In Sohag, he said, the tradition is gradually disappearing.

El-Ghoul stressed that development is inspiring the desire for peaceful living: "People are keen on

**'We have to stretch our hands, like good neighbours do, to the state of Upper Egypt which is south of Cairo and belongs to the Fourth World'**

Ahmed Ragab  
Columnist at Al-Akhbar



**'The deadliest disease is despair. Poverty is only a symptom'**

Mohamed Abul-Isa  
History professor at Minya University



Zar ceremonies: Exorcising evil spirits or treating hysteria?

## Busting the ghost-busters

When it comes to the benefits of science over sorcery, Mariz Tadros discovers that the medical community is as divided as it is skeptical

Seeing may be believing, but when it comes to doctoring, practitioners of alternative medicine argue that believing may also lead to curing. Or at least, they would have argued this had the conference entitled, "Treatment through the realm of the unknown," actually been held as scheduled in Cairo's Qasr El-Aini Hospital.

The decision by Dr Mo'taz El-Sherbini, dean of Cairo University's Medical School, to cancel the conference, which was to include faith healers, religious men and parapsychologists from around the world, brought to a head the debate between medical doctors and practitioners of folk and alternative medicines such as acupuncture, homeopathy and religious incantations. The viability of employing these methods of treatment within the realm of hard science was to be discussed.

El-Sherbini denied, in a conversation with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, that the conference was cancelled, since he maintained, it was never scheduled. Alternative medical cures are particularly popular among members of the lower class, who often cannot afford standard medical care or simply have little faith in it.

"This is a respectable medical institution, and the idea that we may even contemplate holding a conference on magic is ludicrous," he said. "And, if Dr Said Thabet feels that magic has anything to contribute to medicine, this is his own business and his own belief, and in no way reflects those upheld by Qasr El-Aini as an institution." El-Sherbini's beliefs are by no means unique. They are shared by many others in the medical profession who maintain that "snake oil" cures are not only illegal, but also potentially harmful to the patient.

Said Thabet, a professor of gynecology and obstetrics at Qasr El-Aini who was to chair the conference, remains convinced of the healing powers of the mind in cases where modern medicine seems to have reached an impasse.

According to Thabet, the cancellation of the conference came as a surprise given that "we held a previous one in May, at the hospital, which was attended by several prominent doctors, to discuss the theories behind alternative medicine."

"The spirit of the conference existed long before the actual conference was to be held," he

told the *Weekly*. "It will continue until a decision on the use of alternative medicine is reached at the highest level in the Medical Faculty of Cairo University and the other universities."

Although many in the medical profession liken these kinds of conferences to seances or exorcism rituals, Thabet insists that what this conference dealt with was alternative medicine, not magic.

"Do you think that I, Dr Said Thabet, the renowned professor of gynecology and obstetrics, who has undertaken tremendous amounts of research in sexology and metaphysical medicine, as well as being an expert in antiquities, could be called upon by people who want to hold a seance? This is completely unrelated to my interests," he stressed.

For a professor of medicine to be associated on a professional level with *qasraat* or evil spirits and sorcery is anything but flattering. Consequently, during an interview at his clinic in the Sayeda Zeinab district of Cairo, Thabet stressed that he is not interested in finding the "source of the magic, no, sorry, alternative medicine" but in treating the symptoms of the problem. Despite his best efforts, phrases like "being possessed" and "being placed under a spell" find their way into the conversation.

"Magic," he said, before backtracking and replacing the word with the phrase "metaphysical forces," is "any unknown factor causing socio-medical disassociation or pure medical disease." The essence of magic, according to Thabet, lies in the use of electromagnetic waves which emanate from one person to another, with the aim of either healing or harming him.

"For example, while I am sitting here now, I can direct a wave from my mind at you which would prevent you from sleeping tonight. It's easy," he stated. "Also, by using electromagnetic waves, I can find out exactly what you're thinking... or I can move something by concentrating on it and releasing these waves."

The aim of the conference and the 1,300 page document Thabet sought to present to the medical school at Qasr El-Aini, was to introduce "a purified version of magic into the medical curriculum."

"We are not trying to impose the study of magic on medical students," he said. "We are simply

saying that it should be introduced as an option for doctors who would like to treat patients in this manner. This would also put an end to the need for people to go to outside illegal sources, since qualified medical professionals would be available."

Qasr El-Aini, Thabet noted, already owns equipment that can detect electromagnetic waves passing through the heart, brain or muscles. "I have identified what I call the 'mg wave'. This is a magnetic wave stemming from magic. An 'mg wave' appearing under a pure magnetic force machine indicates that the person is under a spell," explained Thabet.

According to books on the occult and the supernatural, in order to protect a person from spells under a spell before marriage or after a birth, certain rituals or rites must be observed. Performing these same rituals is an integral part of breaking spells, especially if the specific cause of the problem cannot be ascertained.

"For example," recalled Thabet, "I treated a man who was married for nine months and had not been able to consummate his marriage. Every time he approached his wife, in his eyes, she appeared to be a monkey chained to the bed. He would run away. He sought psychological help, but could still not find a cure. In the end, I advised his wife to have a *henna* night."

"Now, they lead a perfectly normal married life," states Thabet, who also claims to have successfully treated cases of male impotence, hematuria, and sexual dysfunction.

If doctors were skilled in the field of magic, he noted, they would be able to identify from the beginning whether a patient was suffering from a legitimate medical problem or was under a spell.

Dr Ahmed Okasha, president of the Egyptian Psychiatrists Association and the Association of Arab Psychiatrists, is convinced that doctors who combine medicine with the supernatural are little more than quacks.

The lure of such a cure, argued Okasha, stems from a patient's blind confidence in the healer, irrespective of how irrational the cure or method of treatment seems.

"It's sad that in a country like ours there are still people, even medical professionals, who hold on to such superstitions," he stated. Possibly, suggested Okasha, one of the main reasons

some doctors develop an interest in the healing powers of *dageelien* (practitioners of witchcraft) and sheikhs, is that many of their patients have already visited these healers before coming to the clinics. In a study conducted on 100 women who took part in *zar* ceremonies, 96 per cent appeared to be suffering from psychiatric problems which caused people to think they were possessed — even though eight per cent of them were university students.

"For the majority of my patients, I am their last resort after popular (alternative) methods have failed," noted Dr Ahmed Abdallah, a psychiatrist at the Moqattam Mental Health Hospital! Some patients who suffer from emotional disorders find comfort in amulets and *zar* ceremonies simply because their belief in the healing powers of the occult is so strong, he added. The driving force behind the popularity of these forms of healing, explained Abdallah, is the principle of "plasmoid" — where the power of belief is so strong that "an impotent man is healed once a *dageel* or witch doctor tells him that the *o'mal* or spell that he had been suffering under has been lifted."

Nonetheless, Abdallah is reluctant to give alternative medicine carte blanche. "I've had patients who were sexually abused by those who claim to have power over *o'mareet*," he recalled. "And others who have been beaten senseless during the alleged battle to exorcise a spirit."

The Doctors' Syndicate is equally adamant. "I personally believe that any doctor who resorts to unscientific methods in the treatment of his patients should be expelled from the syndicate," said Dr Omar Shaheen, a professor of psychiatry and deputy of the Doctors' Syndicate. He noted that the syndicate was not informed about the conference. "These [forms of treatment] run counter to a doctors' duty to use proven methods of treatment." Furthermore, he added, using these methods is an indication of the ignorance rampant in our society."

"It is more practical for a villager, to go to a *dageel* than to a psychiatrist whose powers he doubts and who also costs more," said Shaheen. He added that instead of promoting these kinds of treatments, the government should work to upgrade the quality of psychiatric care in Egypt, making it more accessible to the general public.

### Sufra Dayma

#### Koshari with yellow lentils

**Ingredients:**  
2 cups yellow lentils  
1 cup rice  
4 onions (coarsely chopped)  
3 cups water  
Corn oil  
Salt + cumin

**Method:**  
Wash the rice and soak it in hot water for 15 minutes. Strain it and wash the lentils, then mix them together. In a cooking pan, heat two tablespoons of corn oil, then add the water, salt and cumin, and bring to boil. Add the rice and lentils; stir them in the water and cover the pan. When the liquid is absorbed, lower the heat, stir again gently, cover again and place the pan over a simmering ring and leave to cook. In the meantime, fry the onions until crispy brown and strain over kitchen blotting paper. Take half the quantity of the onions and stir it well within the rice and lentils which should by then be almost cooked. Mix well together, cover and leave for ten more minutes. Remove from heat and leave to rest for five minutes, then pour the *koshari* in a serving plate. Sprinkle the remaining fried onions on top and serve hot with a rich green salad.

**Moushira Abdel-Malek**

### Restaurant review

#### Sunshine and smiles

Nigel Ryan on the snack bar's latest emanation

Whatever happened to the snack bar? The very term seems somehow antique. Those pre-franchise fast food outlets, with sandwiches and fizzy drinks and surly waitresses and thick cups full of frothing coffee we stuck forever in an age of innocence, pre-dating the know-how of the burger. They are positively antediluvian, and were practically extinguished by the flood that brought with it a tidal wave of fillet 'o' fish and its derivatives.

This is something of a pity. But snack bars do, thankfully, appear to be making a re-appearance, in the most unlikely guises and the least expected places.

The catering outlet run by the bakery chain La Poire, on the ground floor of the World Trade Centre, is one such emanation. It is, to all intents and purposes, nothing more or less than a good, old-fashioned snack bar, minus the surly waitresses, of course, but with a wide array of sandwiches — both hot and cold — and some startling fizzy drinks.

The La Poire, on the ground floor of the World Trade Centre, is one such emanation. It is, to all intents and purposes, nothing more or less than a good, old-fashioned snack bar, minus the surly waitresses, of course, but with a wide array of sandwiches — both hot and cold — and some startling fizzy drinks.

One such item, the curiously named sunshine, looks deceptively innocuous in an otherwise predictable list of drinks. It was too intriguing to miss, and so was duly ordered, along with a smoked salmon sandwich. My snacking companion ordered a La Poire hot dog, something I could not quite contemplate, but which described itself as a hot dog sausage served in a sesame bun with brown onion gravy.

The smoked salmon sandwich arrived — large, rather generously filled, in slightly messy white bread with capers and a few slices of onion. (One small gripe, not directed at La Poire, but at suppliers of capers. Why are the capers stocked in local supermarkets always in vin-

egar? If they are bottled in brine they at least taste like capers. In vinegar, they might as well be trash.)

I confess that I did not taste the hot dog. It, too, was a substantial looking thing. The brown onion gravy was really a pale beige. But after dousing the object in mustard my companion ate it with a suitable display of relish. He, a regular snacker, and far from unfamiliar with this particular outlet, inevitably orders this particular sandwich. So there you go.

Now to the sunshine. Fizzy lemonade, with lime juice and grenadine — an oleaginous mixture that looked positively post-nuclear when it arrived. Headily stuffy this sweet, sticky, fizzy cup. Hardly the most sophisticated of concoctions but then this is a snack bar, and sophistication is not its stock in trade.

It is not that they do not make an effort. The wrought iron chairs are fashionably distressed. The table tops are polished marble. The space is uncluttered, the waiters efficient, the service quick. But with a huge, man-size polystyrene baguette hanging from the ceiling, filled with what resembled, if it resembled anything, a profuse harvest festival offering, such superficial niceties pale into insignificance.

This particular snack outlet was supplemented by two orders of French fries and one of onion rings. Predictable, fast food fare. The espresso that followed was excellent, and the bill, when it came, which in the end covered what was really a substantial lunch for two, was less than LE30. So roll out the sunshine.

*La Poire, World Trade Centre (ground floor), Corniche El-Nil*

### Al-Ahram Weekly

#### Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

##### ACROSS

- Spanish home (4)
- Puncture (4)
- Brawl; upheaval (5)
- Famous Roman poet (4)
- Strategic scheme (4)
- Divide (5)
- Botanic; innumerate (9)
- Bury (5)
- Sea eagle (3)
- Devoid of life (7)
- Before (3)
- Either's partner (2)
- Cobbler's tool, pl. (4)
- and crafts (4)
- Covetousness (4)
- Metropolitan (5)
- Snapshot (5)
- Headress (3)
- Ladies' long outer garment (5)
- Umpire, abb. (3)
- Inlet (4)
- Certify (4)
- Representation; initial (4)
- Suffix-forming nouns (3)
- Clean; mop (4)
- Leg bone (5)
- Give the go-ahead (5)
- Depart, sl., 2 wds. (9)
- Smart (4)
- River in east central China (3)
- Modify; transform (5)

##### DOWN

- Opposite of 21 across (5)
- Type of broom made with twigs (5)
- Very angry (5)
- Loved (5)
- Nourished (3)
- North American Indian tribe (4)
- American coin (4)
- Urchin (4)
- French girlfriend (4)
- Religious song (4)
- Supplement (3)
- Printing measure, pl. (3)

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56		57		58		59	60	61				
62		63	64			65						
66			67			68						
69			70			71						

12. Manifest; plain to see (5)  
13. Catch of gun-lock holding hammer at full cock, pl. (5)  
18. Pitch (3)  
22. Negative contraction (4)  
24. Voiced (4)  
26. Yes (2)  
27. Hare or cat (4)  
28. Crumbs (4)  
29. Woodwind instrument (4)  
31. Invalid; co-exist (4)  
33. Snuggerly (4)  
34. Efficient; positive (9)  
35. Personal pronoun (3)  
36. Grotto (4)  
37. Time and time again (4)  
38. Smart-aleck (4)  
41. Get along; activity (4)  
42. Smart-aleck (4)  
45. Currency (4)  
47. Nazi special police force, abb. (2)  
49. Amusements (5)  
50. Opposite of 21 across (5)  
51. Type of broom made with twigs (5)  
53. Very angry (5)  
55. Loved (5)  
57. Nourished (3)  
58. American coin (4)  
59. Urchin (4)  
60. French girlfriend (4)  
61. Religious song (4)  
63. Supplement (3)  
65. Printing measure, pl. (3)

Last week's solution:

مكنا من الأصل



### Paradise lost (1)

Unlike many of my classmates, whose parents had given in to the trend and sold their villas moving into modern apartments in more fashionable suburbs, I grew up in Dokki, in a real house complex with a small garden, a paradise for my child.

In those days, Dokki, with its narrow-lined footpaths and its pink, green and yellow stucco houses, surrounded by tidy little patches of grass, flowers and exotic trees, and guarded by policemen standing in the little wooden cabins which dotted the pavements. Every year, our street was recovered with a fresh layer of asphalt, a momentous event for us watching in its every detail.

# Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

The first lesson students of journalism learn is: "It is not news when a dog bites a man. News is when a man bites a dog!" This was not the maxim *Al-Ahram* followed on 30 August 1898 when, on its first page it published the following report from its correspondent in the capital:

"Last Saturday a heart-chilling incident occurred on Darb El-Ahmar and Al-Nasr street when a stray dog attacked and bit 13 children who were playing in the alleys. Ultimately fate intervened and a guard killed the dog."

The body of the dog was taken to the chemical laboratory to determine whether it was infected with rabies. Yet, even if it were discovered that it was infected with rabies, of what use would this knowledge be, since we do not have a hospital that treats the lethal disease?"

With this article, *Al-Ahram* opened a new chapter in Egyptian life: the relationship between man and animals. It is a subject that had made an impact in Europe only a few years previously when the famous French scientist Louis Pasteur discovered a serum to treat rabies.

That the Europeans should have taken the lead in this domain can be ascribed to their precedence in developing modern urban life, which in turn provided the occasion for stray animals to roam the cities. One would be far less likely to see this phenomenon in the countryside, particularly in Egypt, where the relationship between man and his animals is so close that they sometimes share the same roof.

Not so in Egypt's cities, which had undergone radical changes since the Mameluke era. As the medieval city opened up to the modern age, the old gates to separate residential quarters and alleys came down, permitting the entrance of new social strata such as the "alley children". The formerly closed-off quarters also became a haunt for stray dogs and cats, with all the health risks they can pose to human beings. The 13 Darb Al-Ahmar children were not their first victims, nor would they be their last.

At the same time, the Europeans in Egypt opened the eyes of the Egyptians to the fact that not everyone bit by a rabid dog or cat was fated to die, particularly now that Pasteur and his colleagues had developed a successful serum. Moreover, there had arisen in Egypt new social classes capable of affording treatment in the clinics of Europe, notably Greece. It was in the capitals of Europe that the major research into protecting human beings from the health hazards posed by animals was being undertaken. At essence in this research was the spirit of man's humanity towards man, but contained within its folds was the humane treatment of animals.

With the growth of the newspaper industry contributing to the rise of a broader base of public opinion, issues such as this would make an impact on a larger sweep of the populace. By the last decade of the 19th century, the death of an individual as a result of the bite of a rabid dog was no longer just an incident felt within the con-

fines of the victim's family. News of the event would be disseminated around the country, provoking concern and anxiety and also action. It is here that we open the pages of *Al-Ahram* of 100 years ago to the emergence of the humane society in Egypt.

The chapter opens in Alexandria in 1894, three years after Pasteur's death, when a consortium of influential foreigners and Egyptians inaugurated Egypt's first humane society for the treatment of animals.

*Al-Ahram* of 11 May of that year reports:

"A society for the prevention of cruelty to animals has been founded in keeping with such developments in all civilised countries." The new society grouped a good selection of prominent Alexandrian citizens and dignitaries, including the governor of Alexandria and the Coptic Orthodox patriarch, in addition to other distinguished citizens of the port among whom were doctors, civil engineers and merchants.

The writer's enthusiasm for the project is evident from his commentary: "Indeed, Egypt is most deserving of such a society. How frequently have we seen poor animals made to carry far heavier loads than they can bear. How often have we seen these wretched beasts whipped in order to prod them forward when they are already ready to keel over from weakness and emaciation."

From an article published several weeks later, we learn that Sir Charles Crickson, the British consul-general in Alexandria, was the chairman of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. On 18 July the newspaper reports that it had received the charter of the society, which was referred to this time as "The Society for the Protection of Animals". From this report, we also learn that the society had 353 members, that the yearly subscription fee was 10 piastres and that it had elected the governor of Alexandria as its chairman.

In other *Al-Ahram* issues of the period we glean more about the society which had a predominantly European membership. The society soon established a hospital for the treatment of animals. Horses and mules cost 40 millimes to treat as opposed to 20 millimes for donkeys. It also began to intervene in the process of killing stray dogs, which had been one of the functions of the municipal authorities. The society advocated strangulation of these animals instead of poison, because they considered it less cruel.

In less than two years a counterpart to the society was founded in Cairo, as we learn from the following complaint that appeared in *Al-Ahram*: "The carriage that transports students from Shubra can barely make it up the Shubra Bridge as the carriage, filled with some 40 or more students, is only pulled by two weak and tired horses. We therefore ask the Humane Society for the Treatment of Animals to demand that at least one more horse be added to these vehicles."

As the establishment of humane societies for the treatment of animals spread, so too did the criticism they were subject to in the

1 4 4

Emulating the European example, Egypt had its first society for the prevention of cruelty to animals in 1894, three years after the death of Louis Pasteur, the

French scientist who developed the anti-rabies serum. But it took about five years of pressure from the press and public opinion to prevail on the government, then dominated by the British who occupied Egypt, to build a rabies hospital to treat humans bitten by animals. The story of the campaign is told by Dr Yunan Labib Rizq in this instalment of Egypt's history as chronicled in reports published by *Al-Ahram*



Illustration: Makram Henin

name of humanity towards man. The first to voice objections was *Le Bosphore Egyptien*, a French-language newspaper, which wrote that it would be a worthy mission for the members of these societies to direct their concern "toward the conditions of poor and abandoned orphans rather than dumb beasts". Perhaps, the writer advises, they should change their name to societies "for the protection of animals and children" and work toward preventing the harsh treatment of children, "so that they do not avenger themselves on society when they grow up."

*Al-Ahram* adopted this cause as of the middle of 1897. In a lengthy article that appeared on 29 June it poses the question: "If those involved in these societies for the protection of animals against the cruelty inflicted upon them by man indeed felt for their fellow man, they would direct their concern to the protection of human beings before animals." The author took the occasion to note that Egypt lacked societies such as those existing in civilised countries which reward those "who save human lives from drowning, fires, and other such calamities of life. Even if the reward is no more than a medal, these heroes are remembered for their courage and kindness. Nothing of this sort exists in Egypt."

If these two articles tell us anything at all, it is that the risk of contracting rabies from stray animals was beginning to cause considerable public alarm, so much so that the Shura Legislative Council began to

wards animals, new ideas surfaced in the press regarding ways to safeguard man from animals. At first this task fell upon the humane societies which had taken up the responsibility of exterminating animals that posed a risk to human life. *Al-Ahram* regularly featured the monthly reports of the societies, particularly the humane society in Alexandria where *Al-Ahram* was based before it moved to Cairo in November 1899. The society's statistics for July 1896, for example, tell us that of the 198 animals that were admitted to the animal hospital, 150 were cured, nine had to be shot and the remainder still were still under treatment. The report for three months later cites 203 animals admitted for treatment, of which only three had to be shot. But the threat of rabies from cats and dogs still remained a problem of major concern.

As of 1897, the humane societies began to devote their energies to this concern. We read in *Al-Ahram* in the middle of that year that Alexandria's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals brought over from Europe large quantities of muzzles to distribute among the city's dog owners. We also come across an interesting report that an Arab tribe in the vicinity of Simbalawin had succeeded in concocting a herbal potion that cured rabies.

The country which does not reward compassion, honour and humanity is lacking in virtue and in virtuous people."

As writers debated the morality of humanity towards man versus humanity to

take action. The initiative was taken by "the honourable Mohamed Bel Abu Nafie, a member of the Shura Legislative Council" who "petitioned the government in the name of the Council to include in its plans a project to build a hospital for rabies treatment". *Al-Ahram*, along with *Le Phare d'Alexandrie*, praised the initiative and urged the government to give it due attention.

Unfortunately, the government did commit the "folly" of neglect and *Al-Ahram* was incensed. "Between 21 and 22 August, 22 individuals were infected with rabies in the districts of Al-Ahmar, Al-Mahrouq and Bir Al-Assara in the administrative centre of Bilbas. Are our ministers going to wait until more than 22 people are afflicted and until all or most will die of this malignant disease before they are moved by a tremor of human compassion and order the construction of a hospital for rabies?"

Over a year passed without a governmental response, provoking the Shura Council to renew its appeal in April 1898, touching off a new wave of public pressure.

*Al-Ahram* did not spare any punches on the issue. In one article it asked how the government could bring itself to plead lack of funds to build this much-needed hospital which would cost no more than LE1,200, "when it is building a villa for the dean of the Medical Faculty (Mr Keating) costing LE6,000 and a villa for another teacher (also British) worth LE3,000 and a house for the gardener costing LE1,000". The writer then suggests that the government should send the 13 boys to Athens for treatment at its own expense. To drive home the sarcasm, the author adds that the thirteen boys should carry with them a letter addressed to the Greek government saying, "I am Egyptian, mother of wonders and marvels...and calamities. To you, our dear nearby kingdom, which is smaller and not as wealthy as just one of my provinces, unfazed by the palaces which I am building for some of our honoured foreigners, I send a score of young human beings who are being destroyed by the malicious disease of rabies. I therefore most humbly plead that you restore the health to these young boys who shall one day become my soldiers and builders of my greater family and the builders of my future glory."

Evidently *Al-Ahram* was not alone in the plea to send the children to Europe to be treated. The pressures on the government were so formidable that the Health Authority, which was a subsidiary to the Ministry of the Interior at the time, succumbed and took the decision to send the children to Athens to be cured. The day after it was reported that the 13 children had been bitten, news came to light that the correct number of children in question was 17. The public was outraged and "the Honourable Mohamed Saber Pasha, the governor of the capital, has asked the government to act!" The following day, the children were sent off to Athens for treatment at government expense.

The gesture brought public censure, not against the gesture itself, but for the fact that the government's continued reluctance to build the rabies hospital necessitated this measure.

But the government's decision to send the boys abroad received its due share of acclaim as well. "We heartily praise the Council of Ministers for having taken this action," wrote *Al-Ahram*. Later, the newspaper also paid tribute to the hospital in Greece "for their excellent treatment of the infected children, all of whom returned to their homes fully restored to health."

Yet the conclusion of this incident did not end this chapter on "humanity towards one's fellow man". The risk of contracting rabies from stray dogs continued to trouble the Egyptian press, as represented by *Al-Ahram*, which published the following two news items in December 1898.

The first, from Zagazig, reported that a dog bit his owner, one of his owner's relatives and several members of his staff. "The dog was sent to Cairo for medical tests. As for those who were bitten, some travelled to Athens for treatment, although others are unable to do so."

The second item, from Cairo this time, reported that a dog bit four people in Old Cairo. "The government will send the Egyptians among them to the hospital in Athens for treatment at its own expense."

Although the British director of the Health Authority argued that sending rabies cases to Athens was cheaper than building a hospital in Cairo, it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to maintain that stance, particularly when confronted by the arguments, such as that of *Al-Ahram*, that Athens has only 200,000 inhabitants as opposed to a million in each of Cairo and Alexandria. A rabies hospital in Egypt was a necessity, even if the government was unprepared to act. At the end of 1898 the government received two proposals. The first was submitted by a Greek doctor who offered to build a hospital "on the condition that the Egyptian government pay LE2,000 to its medical staff". The second was proposed by the Italian Charity Society, which has pledged itself to undertake the task which the government has declared itself unable to perform, namely to construct a rabies hospital in Cairo."

The Health Authority jumped at the Italians' offer, since, after all, it would not incur any costs to the government. Shortly after it was approved, the Italian Charity Society sent a doctor to Paris for training in the rabies hospital there. Before the close of the century, the rabies hospital in Cairo had opened its doors in order to dispense, for the first time in Egypt, this form of humanitarian assistance.

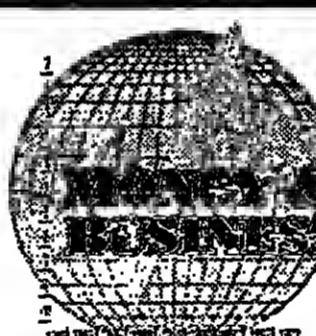
The author is a professor of history and Head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



## Telephone service for villages

SOLIMAN Metwally, minister of telecommunications, stated that 1996 is the year of village telephone service. The Egyptian Telecommunications Organisation has been exerting great efforts to carry out this policy adopted by the minister. The policy calls for providing telephone service and increasing the number of lines in villages throughout a number of governorates. Among the governorates containing villages slated for telephone service are: Kafr El-Sheikh, El-Daqahliya, Sharqiya, Dumyat, Qena, Minya, Assuit, Beni Suef, Sohag, El-Gharbiya and Menufiya.

# MONEY & BUSINESS



## NBE's eminent role in nurturing private sector cement production

AS THE National Bank of Egypt (NBE) thrusts forward in spearheading the gradual transition towards universal banking extending classical and non-traditional services and following government policy in puncturing its weight against developing Upper Egypt, the bank, together with the Egyptian Union for Building and Construction, have elaborated technical, economic and financial studies deemed necessary for the construction of a private sector cement plant in Kofit, Qena Governorate. It is envisaged to be a joint stock Egyptian company in accordance with Law 230 of 1989.

The project is to be established in the Wadi Sondos area, north east of the Kofit/Koseir road in Qena Governorate, covering an area of about 4mn sq metres. It is worth mentioning that the said land is a free grant from the governorate which has a number of advantages, namely bounteous limestone, the key raw material for production, underground water, electricity, gas, oil and multiple roads facilitating the transfer of production.

The issued capital is estimated at around LE300mn, distributed among 300mn shares each valuing at LE10. The said amount is envisaged to be covered by prime contracting firms, members in the Egyptian Union for Building and Construction, some local banks and investors. Moreover, a portion is to be offered for public subscription. It is agreed that NBE's share would hover around 10 per cent of the capital.

Investment costs amount to LE607mn, with capital accounting for 49.4 per cent, loans 49.4 per cent, and sales down payments 1.2 per cent.

The construction process would span 45 months, to begin real production in 2000 with an annual productive capacity of 1.2 tons. It is envisaged that the project will play a pivotal role in gratifying the needs of Upper Egypt.

In fact, NBE's dedicated efforts are quite evident in its formidable participation in 105 projects with total value amounting to LE11.2bn of which NBE accounts for 1.3bn, thus pinpointing to the fact that NBE is tread-

ing all economic fields.

Investment conference in Moscow  
MOHIEDDIN El-Gharib, minister of finance, and Ibrahim Fawzi, head of the executive board of the General Investment Organisation, inaugurated a conference in Moscow on investment in Egypt, focusing on new financial possibilities and ways to attract and increase foreign investment in Egypt. The conference was held as the result of an agreement with the commercial and economic relations minister in Moscow. In mid-October, an exhibition will be held featuring Egyptian goods that can be marketed in the former Soviet Union.

Ahmed Shiha, head of the Egyptian Assembly for Technological Marketing, said that the Russian market is considered one of the strongest markets

in the world, and has high purchasing power, operating under a free-market economy rather than under the sole authority of the government. Not wishing to ignore the potentiality of such a market, Egyptian exporters have long maintained strong ties with Russian commercial companies, many of which are headed and staffed by former employees of government-run companies, in order to continue and maintain the close cooperative bonds that now take place under the free-market economy currently prevailing in the country.

Shiha added that the Russian market is now considered to be one of the most promising marketplaces for Egyptian goods, with their high quality

and competitive prices, placing Russia on the map of Egyptian export countries. In cities such as Moscow, most imported goods from other countries tend to be overpriced and out of the price range of the average Russian. An excellent opportunity has therefore presented itself before Egyptian companies to reclaim the Russian market, using modern marketing techniques.

This form of coverage which Delta Insurance Co. is providing falls within the framework of its policy of providing unusual or specialised kinds of insurance within the market.

Chamber of commerce promotions  
MAHMOUD El-Arabi, head of the Cairo Chamber of Commerce, carried out the largest amount of promotions in the history of the chamber, raising 44 workers to different ranks. The promotions were made with the aim of encouraging increased efforts to develop the chamber in serving the commercial sector.

The promotions are part of a plan initiated by El-Arabi to further develop the executive body of the chamber in correspondence with the vital role it currently plays within Egypt's economic liberalisation policy.

AN AGREEMENT between Delta Insurance Co. headed by Fathi Youssef, and the organisers of the First International Arabian Horse Exhibition has been signed, by which the company will provide coverage for the exhibition, which will take place in September. In accordance with this agreement, the exhibition's organisers will promote insurance throughout all stables in Egypt, with the company offering the best prices and terms of cover-

age.

Fathi Youssef

Delta Insurance to cover horse exhibition

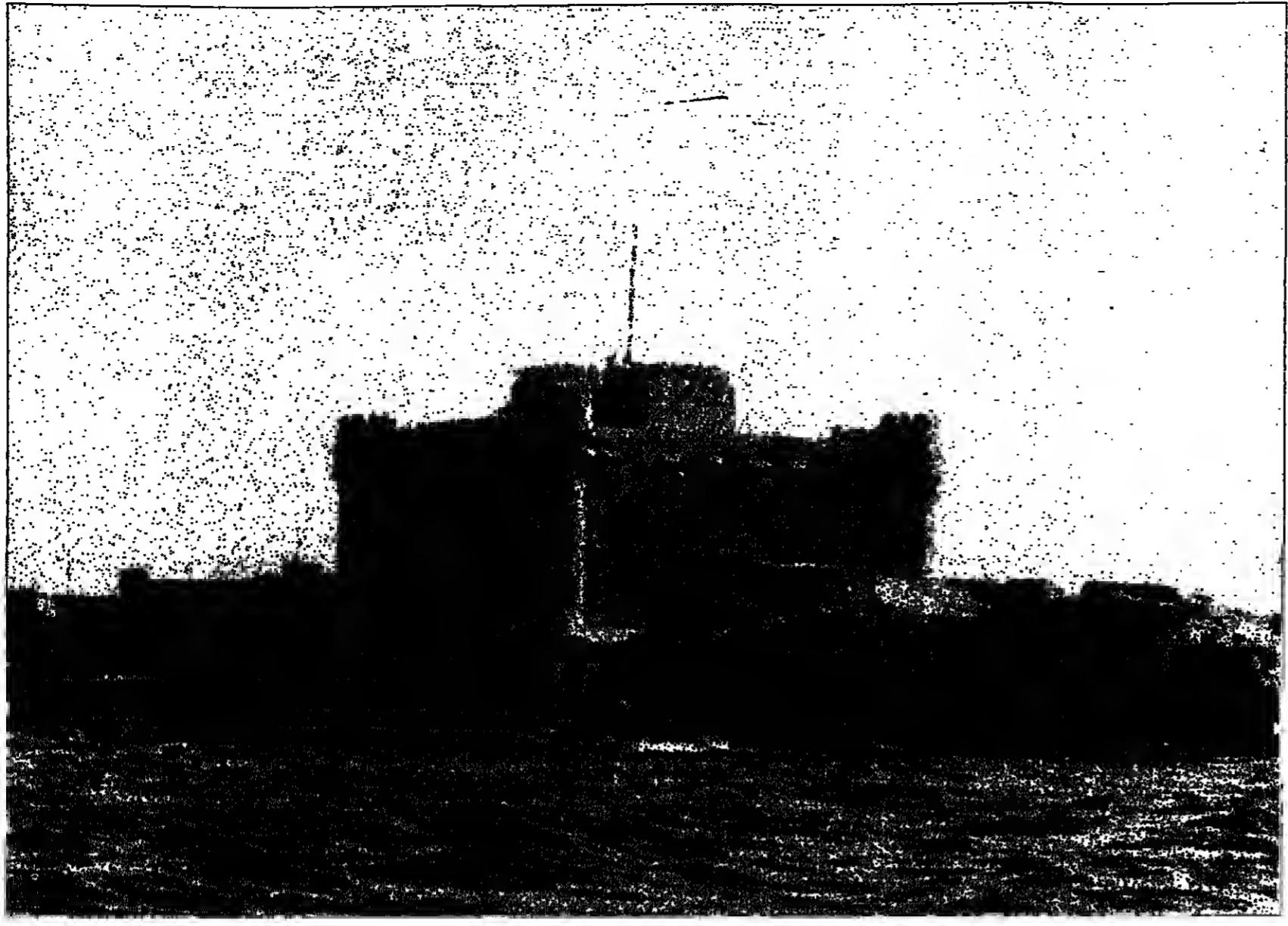
Qait Bey fortress will host the opera *Otello* for its debut in Alexandria

photo: Ahmed Mostafa

## How to get there

### Buses

**Super Jet**  
Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurgada and Sinaia. Tel. 772-663.

**Cairo-Alexandria**  
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 5pm; LE21 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15pm. Tickets from Almaza LE38; from the airport LE32 each way.

**Cairo-Marsa Matruh**  
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir square. Tickets LE36.

**Cairo-Sidi Abd-el-Rahman**  
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am then 9am, 10am, 1pm, 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE13 each way.

**Alexandria-Port Said**  
Services 6.45am, from Ramsis Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE2 each way.

**Cairo-Hurghada**  
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Departs Hurgada noon and 3pm. Tickets LE10 until 5pm, LE15 thereafter, both each way.

**Alexandria-Hurghada**  
Service 8pm, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurgada 2.30pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

**Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh**  
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

**East Delta Bus Company**  
Buses travel to North Sinai, South Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qalati (near Ramla Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbasiya Square. Tel. 482-4733.

**Cairo-Ismailia**  
Service every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets double bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.35, one way.

**Cairo-Suez**  
Services every half an hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets double bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

**Cairo-El-Arish**  
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets double bus LE21, air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

**Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh**  
Services every 45 min, from 7am to 6.30pm, from Abbasiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

**Cairo-Nuweiba**  
Service 8am, from Abbasiya, then Almaza. Tickets double bus LE31.

**West Delta Bus**  
Stations of Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

**Cairo-Hurghada**  
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

**Cairo-Safaga**  
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

**Cairo-Dessau**  
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

**Cairo-Luxor**  
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

**Cairo-Aswan**  
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

### Trains

**Cairo-Luxor-Aswan**  
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers.

**Services to Luxor and Aswan**  
7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40am and 8am, Aswan 8.10am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners, to Aswan LE300 for Egyptians; to Aswan LE190 for foreigners.

**"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers**

**Services to Luxor and Aswan**  
6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor; first class LE51; second class LE51. Tickets to Aswan; first class LE63; second class LE37.

**Cairo-Alexandria**  
"Torbini" trains

**VIP train: Service 8am, 1pm, 2pm and 3.30pm. Tickets LE12.**

**Cairo-Port Said**  
Services almost every half hour from 6am to 8am, then 9am, 10am, 1pm, 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE13 each way.

**"French" trains**

**Services hourly from 6am to 11.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE20.**

**Cairo-Port Said**

**Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.**

**EgyptAir**

**There are between two and five flights daily: Cairo-EgyptAir: 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 759-9806.**

**Cairo-Aswan**

**Tickets LE300 for Egyptians; LE991 for foreigners, both round-trip.**

**Cairo-Luxor**

**Tickets LE230 for Egyptians; LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.**

**Cairo-Hurghada**

**Tickets LE238 for Egyptians; LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.**

**Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh**

**Tickets LE246 for Egyptians; LE891 for foreigners, both round-trip.**

**Sunny summer deals**

**Holiday packages**

**Hotels**

**Here's a look at the special rates most hotels, especially resorts, are offering to Egyptians and foreign residents.**

**Hurghada**

**Regina Hurghada LE120 per person in a double room including breakfast, dinner buffets and taxes. Valid until the end of the summer season.**

**Sharm El-Sheikh**

**El-Sherif Marriot LE240 for a single or double room including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.**

**Sharm El-Sheikh Movenpick Hotel**

**LE2,850 for 8 days. Nice and London is LE3,490 for 15 days. Spain and Portugal is LE4,250 for 11 days.**

**Afghan Royal is LE3,280 for 10 days. Paris and London is LE4,350**

**for 15 days. Rome, Florence, Venice is LE4,750 for 10 days and**

**Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok is \$3,335 for 19 days.**

**Prices for a special cruise around the Mediterranean in deluxe boats start from \$1,382 for 8 days.**

**Travel agencies**

**Travel agencies are offering various packages both inside and outside Egypt this summer.**

**Flamingo Tours**

**LE2,850 for 8 days. Nice and London is LE3,490 for 15 days. Spain and**

**Portugal is LE4,250 for 11 days.**

**Afghan Royal is LE3,280 for 10 days. Paris and London is LE4,350**

**for 15 days. Rome, Florence, Venice is LE4,750 for 10 days and**

**Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok is \$3,335 for 19 days.**

**Prices for a special cruise around the Mediterranean in deluxe boats start from \$1,382 for 8 days.**

**Karnak Tours**

**is organizing trips to Marsa Matruh for 4 days in three star hotels on a half board basis at prices starting from LE295. The company is also offering trips to Ismailia for 8 days at prices starting from LE1,450.**

## Alexandria '96

As September approaches, preparations for the "World Festival of Alexandrias" are under way. Rehab Saad reviews the proceedings

Alexandria is preparing to receive guests for the Second World Festival of the Alexandrias, September 19-28, under the auspices of Mrs Suzanne Mubarak. The festival will include folkloric dancing from each of the 22 participating oases, art exhibitions, fashion shows and most notably, a performance of the opera *Otello*, which will take place at Qait Bey fortress.

Roads are paved, electrical wiring is renewed, five-star hotels are prepared to receive dozens of participants and guests, and tourist programmes are scheduled to entertain the guests during their stay in Alexandria.

Dozens of young people have volunteered to accompany the delegates, help clean the city and organise traffic during the event.

Additionally, security measures are in place to help make the event successful.

We have a reliable plan for transporting the delegates from the airports in Cairo or Alexandria to their hotels. And regarding the opera *Otello*, we will have special buses stationed all over Alexandria to transport the audience from their hotels to Qait Bey," said Zain Ebeidy, head of the higher committee of transportation and reception for the festival.

Ebeidy pointed out that Misr Travel, the transportation sponsor

for the festival, together with several private sector travel agencies, is listing the festival in their brochures as an option for tourists visiting Egypt. "The groups coming to Egypt, either to Cairo, Hurgada or Sharm El-Sheikh, can use the event to pay a visit to Alexandria as well. Moreover, EgyptAir will operate charter flights from the Egyptian tourist resorts to Alexandria for the performance of *Otello*, returning soon after the performance," Ebeidy told *The Weekly*.

He added that special sightseeing programmes are scheduled within Alexandria. "There are trips to the Graeco-Roman Museum, the amphitheatre, Pompeii's Pillar and the catacombs of Kom El-Shokafa. There are also programmes for trips outside Alexandria to Alamein, where the cemeteries of victims from the second world war can be seen, and Rosetta," he said.

Special hotel rates will be provided for guests during the event, "foreign guests will pay the same rates as Egyptians," said Dr Khalil Zaki, producer of the festival. According to Dr Mamoud El-Belougi, the minister of tourism, one night will cost \$100, including transportation inside Alexandria.

An art exhibition is intended to be one of the main attractions of the festival. "About 80 paintings, dat-

ing as far back as the 18th and 19th centuries, will be displayed in the Museum of Plastic Arts in Alexandria. Additionally, a Greek painter will come expressly to exhibit his work in the Shallash Garden in the city centre," said Hazem Abu Shleib, head of the regional authority for the promotion of tourism in Alexandria.

The festival will not concentrate its efforts exclusively on tourism," declared Ebeidy, "it will include an exhibition of Egyptian products as well. This is a good chance for our products to appear on international television, as reporters from all over the world will be covering the event," he said.

The aim of the festival, which will cost about LE4 million, is to promote Alexandria as a tourist and cultural city," said Abu Shleib. He added that visitors will never forget the performance of *Otello* at Qait Bey, a fort similar to the one Vercingetorix had in mind when he wrote the opera. "We have a large area in front of the fort, approximately 1,700 sq metres, which can seat up to 3,312 people."

Marketing the Alexandrias of the World is now the Ministry of Tourism's top priority. Recently the ministry issued two brochures detailing the event for world wide distribution.

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While the museum is naturally overwhelmed with Greek and Roman items are also exhibited. The most noteworthy items range from the third century BC to the third century AD. An hour or two is sufficient to enjoy the marble objects, mosaics and jewellery. A little garden in the centre courtyard arranged with fragments of columns, sarcophagi and stone inscriptions is a pleasant resting place for those who wish to spend more time in the museum.

Exploring each market takes time, at least an hour for interested shoppers who are likely to find intriguing bargains. The jewellery shops of Fransa Street offer items not likely to be found in Cairo's stores. The earrings and rings are more delicate and carefully crafted. Silver, on the other hand, is not as stylish as the modern bracelets and necklaces sold in Khan El-Khalili. Shoppers will find, however, that prices of mass-produced silver goods are better in Alexandria.

Many Alexandrians say that enjoying the view from the Qait Bey fortress is the best way to conclude a day in the city.

Located on a promontory jutting out from the Corniche, this Islamic landmark was built by Sultan Ashraf Qait Bey in 1495 to face the Mediterranean and the eastern harbour for defence purposes. Today, visitors flock to watch the Mediterranean sunset from Qait Bey's thick stone ramparts and enjoy the bird's-eye view of pastel-colored fishing boats docked in the harbour below.

It is easy to understand the nostalgia that keeps fans of Alexandria returning to the port city season after season.

## An Alexandrian stroll

From its development as a Greek port to a cosmopolitan city, Alexandria has had a long history. Today, it contains vestiges of every historical age, recounts Dina Ezzat and Jessica Jones

Many travellers regard Alexandria as a summer retreat or weekend destination, but the coastal city is equally enjoyable for day trips. Visiting attractions from different historical eras is perhaps one of the best ways to experience the character of the city.

There are many ways to schedule a day's excursion because Alexandria is an amalgamation of centuries of art, culture and politics. One plan could include the Graeco-Roman Museum with its collection that hints at Alexandria's former ancient grandeur, Zain El-Sit (the women's market), a unique feature of the city's shopping district, the Mameluke fortress of Qait Bey, one of the few Islamic monuments of Alexandria, as well as the old cafés and restaurants that recall the old cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Mediterranean harbour.

From its foundation by Alexander the Great in 331 BC to its capture by Octavian in 30 BC, Alexandria was the capital of a great empire and the intellectual and social centre of the Hellenic world. Later, during the first six centuries of Christianity, it was a venue of theological speculation about the nature of the universe and the relationship between God and man. After the Arab conquest in 641, the new rulers established a new capital what later became Cairo, and Alexandria lost its importance. But the former Greek capital was never completely marginalised. In the first decades of the 19th century, Mohamed Ali revived the city by establishing the country's first modern navy there. In the latter half of the same century, Khedive Ismail turned the harbour into a cosmopolitan city.

El-Ramlet Station at Saad Zaghloul Square is the city centre. Several tea-rooms and cafés cluster around the square facing the corniche. Visitors arriving in the early morning will find these cafés open and ready to serve freshly-baked croissants, tea and cappuccino. Built by European residents around the turn of the century, the cafés were not just social meeting places; they were also centres of political and literary activity. Octogenarian waiters who have spent their lives working in the same establishments tell stories about the original owners, the good old days of Alexandria and the literati who frequented the now almost century-old coffee-houses and wrote about them.

The Graeco-Roman Museum on El-Horriya Street is within walking distance of El-Ramlet Square. Founded in 1891, the museum first opened its doors with collections donated by individuals or transferred from the Antiquities Authority in Cairo. A continually increasing interest in Graeco-Roman art and archaeology helped the museum grow and in 1893 the Alexandrian Archaeological Society was founded. Excavations also yielded many interesting pieces that found their way to the halls of the museum.

# Promises topped

Promises may be a dime a dozen, but when they are made by Egypt's athletes at the Paralympic Games, it's time to pull out your abacus. Abeer Anwar puts two and two together

The Egyptian Paralympic delegation more than made good on the promise they gave fans as they set out for the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games. The athletes left for the US vowing to show the world that Egypt was a competitor to be reckoned with as they pledged to bring back no less than 25 medals. True to their word, by the closing of the Games last Sunday the athletes had collected 30 medals including 8 gold, 11 silver and 11 bronze.

The athletics team were the stars of the delegation, taking 22 of the 30 medals won by Egypt. Zakiya Abdel-Rahman started the winning streak, setting a new record in the javelin with a 23.40m throw for the gold medal. Ahmed Khairy and Ahmed Antar, competing in the same event, won the silver and bronze in the javelin. "Not to be outdone, Ahmed Sedig captured the gold and set a new Olympic record in the 400m sprint after taking third in the 100m sprint for the bronze. "I am pleased that I was able to accomplish what I had promised in the 400m and I feel satisfied with my score," said an elated Sedig.

Egypt caused a sensation as for the first time in Paralympic history three athletes from the same country captured all the medals of an event.

Mervat El-Sayed, Zakiya Abdel-Rahman and Sohair El-Komi were able to win the gold, silver and bronze respectively in the shot put events.

Egypt's unexpected achievement caused a quandary for the organising committee as they scrambled to find three Egyptian flags for the awards ceremony.

El-Komi herself caused a stir as she fainted for joy and spent the next four hours alternating between unconsciousness and hysterics.

Another world record fell as Ahmed Khairy defeated all-comers to win the gold medal in the discus with a 51.12m throw. Hani Eissa and Shabana El-Khatib likewise scored silver and bronze medal in shot put events. A proud Mohamed Said Amin brought in the team's last medal with a bronze in the javelin.

Sprinter Ahmed Hassan raced away with the bronze medal in the 200m. Mohamed Abdel-Qader, confirming the trend of smashing records, set a new world record with his 50.66 shot put throw for the gold medal. Teammate Hani Eissa came up number two with the silver in the same event and Metwally Mashaan won the silver medal in the 60kg weight category.

Weightlifter Ahmed Gomaa, gold medalist at the Barcelona Paralympics, elevated himself to victory, lifting a record 177.5kg for the gold. Fellow team member Mustafa Fadool won the silver medal in the 82.5kg category with a 200kg lift and Emad El-Din Bahgat was able to collect the silver in the 67kg classification after lifting 137.5kg.

Bahgat tried his best to beat his Chinese competitor and his failure weighed heavily on him as he grudgingly admitted his rival's feat. "I couldn't lift anymore than that. This is an outstanding man," commented Bahgat.

Abdel-Moniem Saleh, in his first international contact, was able to win the bronze medal in the 75kg category with a 197kg lift. Sherif El-Husseini collected two silver medals in as many days competing in the 100kg and over 100kg. In the same event, his teammate, Ahmed Antar, won the bronze medal to add to his gold in the shot put and the bronze in the javelin.

Essam Zeidan's silver medal won in the 50m backstroke saved the face of the swimming team by providing the squad's only medal. Although the 5-member swimming team weren't up to their best in Atlanta, they were Egypt's black horse in Barcelona '92. Dr Nabil Salem attributes the poor showing to the last-minute reclassification the organising committee had implemented.

At the closing of the Games, Egypt with her 30 medals was ranked 21st among the 127 countries participating.



Hossam El-Din Mohamed, Egypt's champion and bronze medalist, in training for the javelin competition

photo: Arif Saeedoddin

As the premier football league bounced into action for the new season, the week's results did little to shed light on the future. Eric Asomugha recaps the week's events

The national premier football league kicked off the 1996/97 season last week with a home game match between Aswan and Kroum. The season opener coincided with the first round of elections for the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) board. The elections, scheduled for each zone, will proceed in stages until the emergence of a new board in September. Unpredictable as the internal political games taking place at the Gebelay Street address of the EFA are, they will surely be dwarfed by the rumblings on the field.

Playing the first match of the season, Aswan thrashed fellow debutante Kroum 4-1 in Aswan. In other home victories, Ismailia beat Aluminim 2-1, Ittihad Alexandria defeated Qena 1-0, Mansura trounced Mariout 6-2, Ahly beat Arab Contractors 2-1 and Zamalek crushed Ittihad Osman 3-1. Suez lost at home to Shebin 1-0 and Masri drew 1-1 with

Baladiya El-Minya for the first draw of the season.

League champions Ahly, playing without their Ghanaian top goal scorer Ahmed Feix, were forced to wait till the 37th minute goal by Hossam Hassan in the second half to clinch a 2-1 win over Arab Contractors.

Ahly, in a lacklustre encounter, were lacking proper game formation and all their initial efforts for a goal were to no avail. In a brilliant move Walid Sabah El-Din, who had been threatening the Contractors' defences, was brought down in the box. Arab Contractors Hadi Kashaba nearly converted the penalty in the 51st minute for the first goal. The Contractors, playing in a defensive mode, with goalkeeper Ahmed Sabry making excellent saves, were forced out after the goal.

Mohamed Ouda, on the receiving end of a de-

flected kick equalised the match six minutes later.

Ahly's coach Reiner Hollman, in an attempt to break the stalemate brought in two substitutes. Hisham Hanafi came in for Hadi Kashaba and Yasser Rayan was replaced by former Arab Contractors Ahmed Nakhlia.

Reduced to 10 men before the break Contractors' coach Michael Kruger stood motionless and seemed unsure if his team could hold on to a draw.

The Contractors' defence remained hard to crack, but collapsed as Mohamed Youssef skilfully volleyed the ball to Hossam Hassan who headed it into the far left of the post for the winning goal in the 37th minute.

Ittihad Osman, met one of the league giants in

their first match as Zamalek took the game 3-1.

Zamalek's unpredictable striker Ayman Mansur cel-

ected the new season with a hat-trick to score the

winning goal.

Zamalek with aggressive play took the lead in the 44th minute. Ittihad Osman came back to equalise in the 5th minute of the second half as a own goal strike bounced into the net after glancing off defender Tarek Mustafa's body. Goalkeeper Hussein Sayed was hard pressed to save Zamalek from further damage.

Ayman Mansur wasted no time planting the 26th minute second goal. Holding the opponent to their own half, Zamalek took better control and co-ordinated their attack from behind. In the 34th minute, Ayman Mansur completed his hat-trick from Kasi Said Yusuf's cross. With time running out, Ayman Ragab squandered a penalty and lost the chance for Ittihad Osman to reduce the gap.

At this early stage of the league, goal scoring plays as significant a role as the points earned.

The 49-year-old Spaniard, however, was surprised upon hearing rumours and accusations that he deliberately failed to lead the Egyptian team to victory against his home country. "I am very surprised and sad to hear that for many reasons. It was very important to me to win this match against Spain. I am a professional coach and I am working with the Egyptian team and it is important to my career to win. If people knew my personnel situation, they would understand. I trained the national Spanish team for four years, and when the elections came in December '93, and new officials took over the responsibility of the new federation, they threw me out of my job and replaced me with another coach, and so I was very keen to win that particular match against Spain," Cuesta explained.

"I coached Egypt in the Olympics and I really wanted to win and that is why I briefed my players on every single Spanish player. I was once their coach and I know them. Goalkeeper Ayman Salahi performed the best in that match when he followed my instructions. But again, we lost because of the referees' bias," he said.

Years before the Olympics, the Egyptian federation promised its national team players it would allow them to play as professionals

players abroad after Atlanta '96. Now that the

Olympics are over, the federation is ready to

execute the decision, on condition that the

players prefer any proposals they receive to the officials for study.

The team's manager, Cuesta refused to give any comments on the issue. He declared that it is important for the future of the national team, and until there is a final decision by the officials, he would not discuss the matter.

Meanwhile, Cuesta is preparing an evaluation report of the team's performance in Atlanta, and is developing a long-term plan for

the team's preparations for the African Champion-

ship in Benin next October and the world Cham-

pionship in Japan in 1997.



Egypt's champion, Ashraf Helmi, playing against Qatar's Gaber Afifi in the team event. Egypt won 3-0, though Helmi was unable to make it to the singles' final

Last week Egypt's table tennis teams trampled the competition underfoot at the 15th Arab Championship and the table's set for the taking of the singles' gold

The indoor halls of Cairo Stadium witnessed the honouing of all four Egyptian teams competing in the 15th Arab Championship. The Egyptian squads effortlessly swept the matches 3-0 to secure the gold medals in competitive pitting them against teams from 15 countries. Abeer Anwar reports.

Although Qatar and Bahrain early on in the championship turned the tables by surprisingly beating Tunis and the Emirates, the expected winners, Egypt managed to keep the upper hand.

In the women's team event, the squad smashed all opponents on

the way to the finals against Tunisia.

Tunisia's team had great hopes of winning due to the absence of pregnant star player, Nidal Meshref, but Egypt trounced them 3-0. As a result, Egypt took first place, Algeria came in second after defeating Lebanon 3-0 and Tunisia consoled themselves with third place.

Egypt overcame Tunisia in the men's semi-final to meet Qatar in the final. The two teams vied to show each other up, but, in the end the Egyptian players experience and talent prevailed as Egypt's

champions handed Qatar a 3-0 defeat. Qatar was relegated to second and Tunisia third place after besting Saudi Arabia 3-0.

The girls under-17 team event, witnessed the Egyptian team brushing aside all-comers on the way to the final to win 3-1 over Algeria. As a result, Algeria retreated to second place and Syria came third after beating Sudan 3-0.

In the boys under-17 team event Egypt met Syria in the final where Egypt bested the latter 3-1. Egypt came first, Syria second and Kuwait third.

In a surprising match at the men's singles quarter-finals, Ashraf Helmi, Egyptian and Arab champion for four consecutive years lost to Qatar's Hamad Al-Hamdi 2-3. Although Helmi bested Hamdi in his team's match 2-0, he was unable to repeat his success. Hamdi emboldened by cheering Qatar fans revenge his previous loss to Helmi. An over-confident Helmi was easily defeated by Hamdi. The difficult mission of taking out Hamdi is left to Sheriff El-Sakat.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

## Cuesta for hire

The Egyptian Handball Federation has renewed team manager Javier Garcia Cuesta's contract for three more years. Inas Mazhar reports

The Egyptian national handball team displayed strong skills at the Olympics in Atlanta, improving the team's placing at the Games. Their success prompted handball officials in Egypt to renew the contract of the team's Spanish manager, Javier Garcia Cuesta, for three more years, culminating with the men's World Championship in Cairo in 1999. The team placed 11th at the previous Games in Barcelona '92, and under Cuesta's direction, increased their standing by five spots in this year's Olympics.

Cuesta, a former member of the Spanish national handball team, participated in the Munich '72 Games as an athlete. He then went on to coach three different teams representing three different continents in three Olympics Games; Los Angeles '84 with the US, Barcelona '92 with Spain, and Atlanta '96 with Egypt, making him the only handball player in history to participate in four Olympics.

After the contract was signed, Cuesta spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, evaluating the team's performance in the Olympics, and his future plans with the organisation.

"Because of the hopes and expectations we had prior to the Games, I have to say that I am a little disappointed that we did not reach the semi-finals and therefore lost the chance to win an Olympic medal. We knew it was not going to be an easy job. Team skill levels are very close in the Olympics and luck plays a big role in the outcome of a match. However, I am pleased with the team's overall performance and results," Cuesta said.

He explained that it is inaccurate to say that the team has not improved since the world championship in Iceland '95, where they came sixth place. "The team has improved significantly, and their skill level is always improving. You can't compare the Olympics to the world championships, because the Olympics are tougher and the teams are very close. Any team can win the Olympics if it is better than the others. The Egyptian team is more consistent now in the systems of the attack, and has more control in the game. The defence is stronger specially in the man to man play," he said.

He added that the team lost the opportunity to win in the match against Spain when they had it, but unfortunately they were not able to finish the job. "We cannot deny that the referees were not fair in the first half, but talking about the referees when you lose is a waste of time. But, yes, they were against us in the first half and everyone saw it, and in the second half we played very well for fifteen minutes and we tied five minutes before the end of the match, but then we lost all the attacks and were unable to win," he explained.

The 49-year-old Spaniard, however, was surprised upon hearing rumours and accusations that he deliberately failed to lead the Egyptian team to victory against his home country. "I am very surprised and sad to hear that for many reasons. It was very important to me to win this match against Spain. I am a professional coach and I am working with the Egyptian team and it is important to my career to win. If people knew my personnel situation, they would understand. I trained the national Spanish team for four years, and when the elections came in December '93, and new officials took over the responsibility of the new federation, they threw me out of my job and replaced me with another coach, and so I was very keen to win that particular match against Spain," Cuesta explained.

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the team's preparations for the African Champion-

ship in Benin next October and the world Cham-

pionship in Japan in 1997.

## Gold off the table

# Alaa El-Dib: The word and the world

Banned, beleaguered and bewildered:  
he is still fighting the octopus

Alaa El-Dib, like so many Egyptian intellectuals, is faced with a dilemma every day of his life: how is it possible to crystallise the search for the absolute, on one hand, and still remain alert to the most minute contradictions in Egyptian reality, on the other? Alaa El-Dib's has been a chequered career. In his youth, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood but soon receded from their policies towards women's education, attire and work. This disenchantment was intensified when he witnessed the virulent attack of one of the "brothers" on his sister's ambitions. He found his way to the periphery of a communist organisation, without however becoming a full member and applying the approved political line. He then joined the temporary "Liberation Organisation" which replaced the political parties under Nasser. He was later also a member of the secret Vanguard Organisation, established by the regime within its single ruling party, the Arab Socialist Union, but he was never really convinced of the usefulness of the whole endeavour.

El-Dib's passage through all these political parties and ideologies was as light as that of a feather borne by the breeze. But these apprenticeships afforded him sharpened awareness, a solid knowledge of different schools of thought, an ability to empathise with different kinds of people, and a healthy scepticism towards whole-hearted dedication to any political system. His esteem for certain leftists and their sacrifices aside, El-Dib watched left and right trajectory the meaning of "revolution". The word ceased to signify freedom, clarity of purpose or promise of change, and he turned away in disappointment. Literature, then, appeared as the only means of escaping the absurdity and futility of political activism. Even in literature, however, his dreams remained imbued with a desire to change reality.

It is only natural, then, that fighting underdevelopment would be El-Dib's main human and artistic cause. Poverty, hardship, humiliation, oppression and distress are the tentacles of an octopus to be fought at home, at work, in the street; everywhere human beings love, live, accept and reject. The main weapon is an innocent dream of a better future and a sense that one belongs, emotionally, among others. Responsibility for changing the world: Alaa El-Dib carries the burden on his shoulders, and seeks to fulfil it in his work. But his back threatens to break against the stubborn rocks of events and the limitations of possibility. This sense of responsibility is transformed into a rebellion against the world one wanted to change; rebellion, in turn, becomes an intense sense of alienation. Where does it all lead? Should one be content with monitoring one's boredom, checking the feeble pulse of stagnation every now and then?

The committed, lonely writer: El-Dib thinks of Sartre. He accepts those elements of existentialism that link the literary experience with philosophical thought, but he looks at them through an Arab prism.

The "crisis" which occupies centre-stage in his life manifests itself in continuous disruptions. He entered law school while it was undergoing a major transformation; that school which before 1952 was a breeding ground for politicians, leaders and rulers, became an incubator for petty lawyers and clerks after the revolution. The attack on

leading jurist Samouri Pasha in 1954, carried out with the regime's blessing, revealed the pit into which law and its custodians had sunk in the government's eyes.

El-Dib used to play truant from law school — not for walks along the Corniche, but to escape to the university's central library, attached to the Faculty of Arts. There, the crises of all political groups — right, left and centre — were intensely expressed. The old agonised, but its death rattle heralded no real death; the new, despite the volume of its rhetoric, was still weak. In between, the centre oscillated. It was a period of disruptions and breaks.

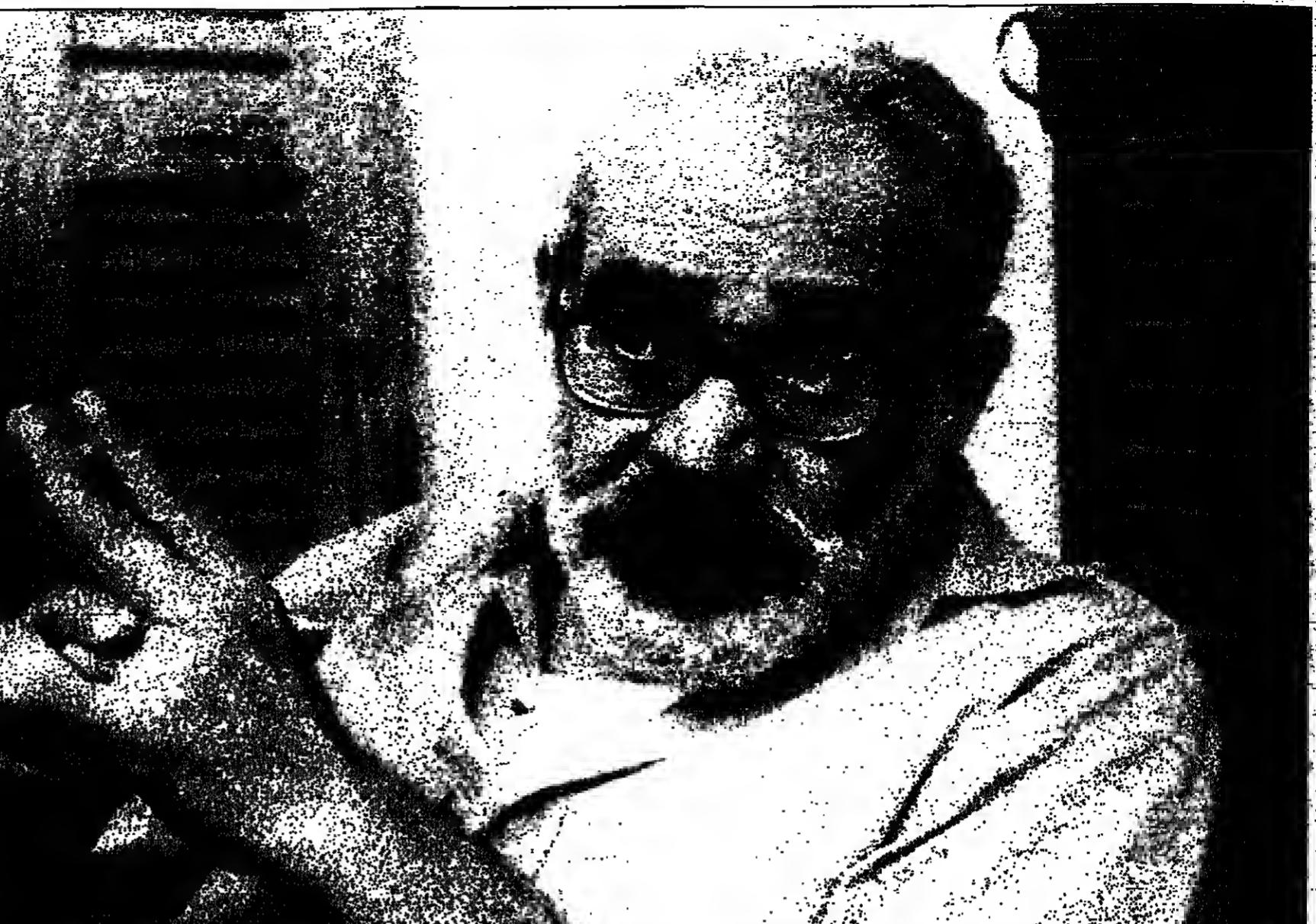
After graduation, El-Dib turned to journalism. It seemed to him a path that could bring together the strands of his literary and artistic interests with his dreams of social change. Then there was the advantage of a wide readership: after all, what is the use of writing for friends with whom he could converse every day?

For him, the gap separating the intellectual from the audience, like that separating him from political parties, could be bridged through effective journalism. Writing for a large audience requires compromises, but for him, clarity and simplicity were not to be sneered at. Clarity, however, was the least of his worries. He never foresaw that a certain shallowness, the repetition of platitudes, would be expected of him. The intellectual was required to echo public opinion as perceived by the regime.

Ideology and power: these are themes he runs up against every day, and they often feel like a brick wall. An intellectual of this stripe deals with conflicting convictions and values linked to specific social forces. Nor does he innocently believe that dominant ideas are neutral: the fact that they reflect material power is all too clear. El-Dib soon realised that the media, including the magazine he worked for, are not free-floating means of communication, nor open forums for debate. Repeatedly, his writings were officially banned, for reasons unknown to him. The brick wall leaves bruises.

In his autobiographical essays, *Awraq Mu'taqaf Masri: Waqf qabil El-Munhadar* ("An Egyptian Intellectual's Papers: Pause before a Precipice"), El-Dib remembers feeling like a servant kept inside the house by the master, for fear that he starve and cause problems. If he dares to persist and anger the master, he will be exiled — consigned to oblivion. El-Dib learned first-hand the limitations on freedom of the press, the contradiction between ideologies and interests, limitations and freedom that brought one specific term to the centre of his mind. Dialectics, a key-concept in El-Dib's mental language, repeated almost obsessively in his writings, also informs his understanding of events in his own life.

While El-Dib tenaciously pitted himself



against the prohibitions slammed on his work, he was often saddened to see the vibrant and dynamic ideas he had committed to paper still-born in print. Most painful of all was the way in which the very words by which he expressed his patriotism were used to charge him and ban his writings. The periods when the media was closed to him left him with a sense of insecurity and banishment — "And how many nights did I feel like an outcast, persona non grata". If a writer's country is the word, to be prevented from writing or to have one's words distorted is indeed a form of exile. The experience is particularly poignant in El-Dib's case: his words were never of the pre-packaged variety, interchangeable terms looked up in a lexicon, the traditional rhetorical baggage so familiar to Arab readers, but the result of perpetual dialogue with the potential and the limitations of reality, carried out by a sharp and questioning mind.

El-Dib's works were not banned in the '50s, when many of his colleagues were imprisoned and tortured. Never a victim of the regime's physical brutality, El-Dib deeply empathised with the plight of those journalists who were, and never participated in the street campaigns launched against them by the authorities. His career in journalism began while he was still an undergraduate, and some of his literary translations, mostly of poems, were published in *Sabah El-Kheir* (his passion for poetry is always discernible in the rhythms of his prose). Since then, El-Dib has produced translations that reveal the breadth of his readings. His collection *Amra'a Fi'l-Thalathin* ("A Woman of Thirty") brought together a variegated selection of writers (Arthur Miller and Truman Capote, among others). Then came Beckett's *Endgame* ("Li-bat El-Nihaya"), translated when the playwright was just being discovered — and adulterated — by a wide audience in Egypt. El-Dib's decision to translate an absurdist play reveals his preoccupation with the contradictions of life and the need for new artistic techniques in art with which to grapple with these ironies. El-Dib also seems to have been aware of an often-overlooked aspect of the theatre of the ab-

surd: the many techniques drawn from popular spectacles — music halls, jugglers and magicians, verbal nonsense and scenic effects. In his critical essays and creative writing, El-Dib would continue to draw on folk art for new sources of inspiration.

But to draw a portrait of El-Dib as an exclusively cerebral man would be misleading — he has often plunged into deeper, more dangerous waters. Intense emotion, the gap between desire and fulfillment, the difficulty of communicating with the other, and the havoc wrought by the pleasure principle: with his marriage in 1972, El-Dib entered a safer, gentler haven.

The early '60s were the days of socialist slogans and alleged victories. El-Dib was a member of the Vanguard Organisation's branch at the publishing house where he worked, though circumstances never allowed him to obtain a membership card. The members of the organisation were given a say in the publishing house, but El-Dib never had that privilege. His 1964 collection *Al-Qahira* ("Card"), is a window into his state of mind at the time. Slogans and triumphal marches look conspicuous by their absence. The hero of the title story — in many ways an Egyptian version of *L'Étranger*'s Mersault — experiences deep loneliness and isolation, at work, in the family, in the street and even in the embrace of the prostitute with whom he lives. His total alienation leads to a sense of claustrophobia. His brother lies dying, his mistress is pregnant: impotency watching his fate unravel, he finds himself committing a murder, although in this case the victim is not a "foreigner" but his own mistress. In court, he denies that he killed his mistress because she was a prostitute; nor was the stress caused by congested public transport the problem, nor yet his hatred of Cairo and its heat, nor the crisis of Left and Right, nor an existential crisis. Simply, he did not want his child to be born as he himself was responsible for nothing; he brazenly enacts a destiny preordained by the Lord, for he is a believer and a good citizen, innocent and scared and incapable even of conceiving of hope.

Ten years later, El-Dib's collection *Sabah El-Gomaa* ("Friday Morning") was pub-

lished. To some critics, this collection was a forerunner of the new wave in Egyptian fiction. El-Dib himself does not understand the classification of writers into generations separated by ten-year generation gaps. He rejects the label "a sixties writer", and sees his work as a consistent attempt to renew fiction and fulfil the new aesthetic demands brought about by each new global transformation.

In 1970, El-Dib was awarded a six-month translation scholarship in Hungary. There, he attuned himself to the fabric of daily life. He fell knee-deep in love; it coloured his vision of the people he met, the Danube, the trees, the old Hungarian poems, and the music of Bartok. He wandered down narrow alleys in small villages and lay down in a field off an agricultural road. In that distant socialist country, he pursued a truth — any unequivocal certitude he could clinch and put down on paper, but only found half-truths and fragments of words.

Back in Egypt, he got married and became a father. He obtained a contract for a job on a newspaper in the Gulf. In two months he had been dismissed "for security reasons": an Egyptian colleague had vouched to the authorities there, on his own initiative, that El-Dib was a communist. Brief though his sojourn in the Gulf was, the patterns of migration to petro-dollar countries occupy as significant a place in his fiction as they do in the lives of many Egyptians. The insidious impact of these Gulf sojourns on Egyptians — echoed in the novels *Afraf Bila Dimou* ("Children Without Tears") and *Qamar Ala Mustango* ("Moon on a Swamp"), among others — is explored from the vantage points of husband, wife and children. What made El-Dib's sixty-day sample of the experience so intense was his empathy with other Egyptians he met there — relatives, friends or strangers, intellectuals or labourers. Hence the vividness of his literary tableaux of Egyptians who have lived in the Gulf, portraits rendered with psycho-

logical depth and a keen awareness of all the dilemmas and transformations involved.

But if there is one thread, one cardinal theme, that runs through El-Dib's creative writing and critical essays, it is, in his view, the question of expression in the lower middle-class: its potential, on one hand, its betrayal of society, on the other. He is himself a member of that class, poised between the lower depths and the upper-crust. Literature, particularly the novel, has consistently sought to represent the bourgeoisie's mores and ambitions, barely taking note of other forms of human life outside that class. The betrayal of society by bourgeois writers, he feels, lies in their disregard for the tremendous energy of the "ordinary people" who constitute the vast majority of humanity. Their linguistic and imaginative resources — access to language at its most raw, creativity of expression — remain untapped. It is such people, he says, who may find a way out of the current crisis. El-Dib does not feel that the word crisis overstates the case: a great part of the contemporary literary and artistic scene, he observes, is parasitic, rootless and marginal to the mainstream of life in Egypt. The sound and fury of art may be exciting, but it is the quiet, everyday life of the people that constitutes the real drama of the crisis.

**Profile by Ibrahim Fathi**

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